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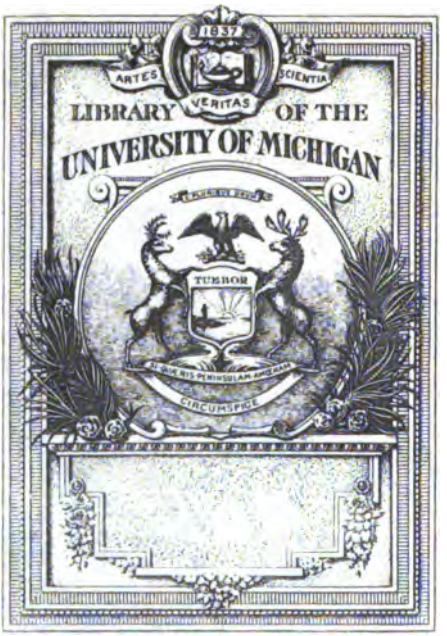

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NATHAN BURKE

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NATHAN BURKE

BY
MARY STANBERY WATTS
AUTHOR OF "THE TENANTS," ETC.

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INTRODUCTION

In a part of the book which (whatever the fate of the rest of it) hardly anybody ever reads, it may not be accounted bad taste for the editor of this history to mention herself, or to set down a few personal recollections. It might have been better to say one personal recollection, for, as usually happens, I find that what I unthinkingly supposed to be a number of consecutive and vivid impressions resolves, upon a rigid analysis, into a single one, and that rather hazy, connected with the inaugural ceremonies of some governor of our State, thirty-five or forty years ago — nearer forty, I fear! My grandfather took me to see the parade, a day to be registered with a white stone — though what governor it was, and what troops, whether militia or regulars that paraded, and why they did it, and what all the crowds, and hurrahing, and brazen uproar of bands, and huge spectacular to-do were about I knew no more than the man in the moon, no more than the other six-year-old youngsters, no more than I do at this moment, and cared as little. It was a raw, drizzling day in January — that being the season humanely selected by our authorities for all such civic celebrations in the open air; we stood on a platform or hustings, jammed in with many others, and I vaguely remember the proletariat surging at our feet. There was, no doubt, the usual protracted wait, the usual dashing up and down of important gentlemen in glorious regalia on horseback, the invariable policemen hustling the invariable drunk-and-disorderlies, the scurrying dogs, the bewildered but resolute old lady who *will* cross the street — no parade ever took place without these accessories. And then, at last, distant cheering, the Star-Spangled Banner on a whole platoon of key-bugles, and the soldiers wheeling into sight half a dozen blocks away. After them open carriages with parties of portly complacent gentlemen, taking off their hats to the crowd, as if it were a privilege to catch

cold in such a cause — one, in particular, who does more smiling and bowing and is saluted with more vigorous roaring than all the others put together, as I observe. Then more bands, and soldiers, and carriages. And *then*, suddenly, with a terrifying outburst of sound all along the street, some one riding at the head of a small company under a haggard old faded dish-clout of a flag that whips tight around the staff in the cold, rain-laden wind. Why does everybody make such an appalling rumpus? And lo, my grandfather, an old gentleman of stately and serene behavior in ordinary circumstances, madly snatches off his high shining hat, and sets it on his cane, the ebony cane topped with gold that men of his age carried in those days, and waves it aloft, and bawls: "Bravo, Nat!" I remember with an extraordinary distinctness how the hat flew off and went skipping about amongst the heads and shoulders of the proletariat until it was rescued by an agile member thereof, who shinned up one of the posts supporting our rostrum to restore it. "That's right, old hoss!" he said approvingly as my grandfather once more brandished it in the face of Heaven, holding it firmly by the brim this time, however. "Naw, I don't want yer money. Give him a good one! Yay, Yay, Yay! Fighting Burke! Fighting Nat Burke! Yay, Yay, Yay!" Thus does this son of toil express himself with vast energy and lungs of sole-leather. One of us is a little frightened, I believe.

There succeeds an interval foggily associated in my mind with ice-cream; and then we are posted under some kind of portico, and I clutch my grandfather's hand very tight, as somebody rides up with his great glossy long-tailed black charger flinging the gravel of the roadway this way and that and champing on two or three bits, with two or three bridle-reins — so they appear to me. Of the ensuing conversation I recollect every syllable by some freak of memory. "Hey, General!" remarked my grandfather. "Hey, Charlie!" returned the hero; and, looking down from his elevation, uttered these wingèd words, "You've got your hat knocked in on top." My grandfather took it off and examined it with a rueful grin. "Too much enthusiasm, Nat," he said; "it's no matter, this rain's ruined it anyhow. Did it rain like this at Chapultepec?" General Burke says that it didn't rain at Chapultepec. It rained at Contreras, though —

and, to my dismay, "Whose little girl is that?" he asks. My grandfather explains that it is John's little girl; whereupon I am lifted up to the pommel of the saddle, and cling there between terror and delight while the great man (who seems at least eight feet high, and, as his thick hair is white, must be, in my judgment, a hundred years old) looks at me with his steady, bright blue eyes, and asks me how old I am, and how far I have got in the Reader?

And here, to be strictly honest, this record must close; for what else the general said and did on the one occasion when I saw him, I cannot remember — or cannot disentangle what I remember from what I have been told. I must believe the occurrence was of some importance, for I was never allowed to forget it; but upon these skeleton memories the older people about us — and we ourselves in later years — unconsciously hang such a fabric of ideas and suggestions that a childish recollection ought not, after all, to count for much, if it were not that by these feeble links the generations are strung together; and the merest wire of a tradition may still bring us some message from the lonesome dead.

General Burke was in active legal practice up to the time of his death, which occurred very suddenly of heart failure, during the summer of 1889. He was known by his family to have been occupying his spare moments with writing his autobiography; and, indeed, was found at the last (by his daughter-in-law, with whom and his son, James S. Burke, he made his home after his wife's death) sitting lifeless at his desk with the pen in his hand, a piece of manuscript before him, and a great quantity of the papers — old letters, fragments of diaries, newspaper clippings, and so on — which he had accumulated to assist him in this task, scattered about the table. In the haste, confusion, and distress of the discovery these were all swept aside into drawers and portfolios; and it was not until some while afterwards, when the Bar Association and the members of General Burke's commandery of the Loyal Legion proposed to publish their several memorials, that any attention was given to this collection of memoranda, from which, being under his own hand and as it were authoritative, much valuable and interesting information might have been extracted. Now, however, a difficulty

arose: the papers had got into the greatest disorder, the manuscript biography itself bore traces of Burke's evident intention to revise and alter it, no one knew in what sequence the letters and clippings were to be inserted, if at all, and finally, even if the general's plan had been perfectly clear, or his work finished, it was to be doubted whether — as many of the people whom he mentions were still living, and as he had uttered his mind about them and others with entire freedom — it would be advisable, or in accordance with his desire, to make the autobiography, or any part of it, public. In the end, as commonly happens, nothing was done; none of Burke's heirs felt disposed to take any responsibilities; and the whole mass of writing lay neglected in its box, was carted about the country in the course of many changes of residence or other family upheavals, tenanted a dozen attics, and at the last was actually preserved from complete oblivion and perhaps destruction by a chance inquiry from the custodian of our State Historical Society. He was preparing an article for one of the monthlies on the Mexican War; and finding a reference to General Burke as the "Hero of Chapultepec," wanted to inform himself further. As it turned out, however, a minute examination of all the printed and written documents the general had collected failed to unearth anything about Chapultepec, except a couple of lines in his journal, "*Sept. 13, 1847. 9 o'clock at night. In camp outside Belen Gate, City of Mexico. Castle stormed this forenoon. Very tired.*"

The task of editing this memoir fell to me as being one of the few people who remembered its author, warmly interested in the history of the State, and, for a final touch, a follower of letters, accustomed to the preparation of matter for print. If I judge Burke aright, nothing could have given the old gentleman more ironic amusement than the prospect of his autobiography committed to the cares of a literary woman; but I have tampered with it as little as possible. Somewhere Burke quotes old George Marsh as saying: "You let a man talk half an hour and he'll tell you what sort of a fellow he is." Put a pen in his hand and let him write unreservedly, and he will do the same, I think. Nay, let him write as artificially and with as much restraint as he chooses, still will he write himself down an ass, a sage, a coward, a hero,

a rogue, an honest man, in spite of him! Burke wrote consciously for posterity — his own posterity, that is, and not without some posing; witness his funny and rather amiable little affectation of relating his story (except when he forgets or grows excited) in the third person, like Cæsar. Yet no man could have felt a heartier hatred for the sham; and he was too shrewd or had too intimate a knowledge of the world not to realize that nothing he could say would describe or explain people one-half so well as what they said themselves. That, doubtless, was his reason for preserving the scores of letters which we found interspersed with his notes and diaries. Some of them are almost without interest, even to the family; and it has been repeatedly pointed out to me that many (in fact, most!) of George Ducey's and Anne's are — in the sturdy phrase of one commentator — "no better than so much waste paper," from which nobody on earth could get either entertainment or instruction. But it seems to be the plain duty of the general's literary executor to present them in full as he probably intended.

There are only two or three likenesses in existence of Nathan Burke. Needless to say, he was not an eight-foot giant in stature; a daguerreotype taken about 1852 shows him to have been a slender man not much over medium height, with brown or dark hair which became very white later, although he did not live to an advanced age. He died August 4, 1889, in his sixty-eighth year. The head in oils owned by Major John V. Burke was executed by a Mrs. Spencer, who had some local fame, in 1867; it is not considered a good likeness by the family; and, although Burke never could have been a particularly good-looking man, it is difficult to believe that his face was so smooth and characterless as the painting represents it. In the hall of the Pioneer Society rooms there hangs a tremendous, panoramic lithograph having for its subject "General Taylor at Buena Vista." Old "Rough-and-Ready" is there depicted on his famous white horse, posturing in the middle with his brigade-commanders and aides disposed throughout the landscape in a variety of swashbuckling attitudes. They are all numbered and labeled in the margin; and one with a cocked hat, curling side-whiskers and an engaging smile, caught in the act of running a Mexican through, is noted in the index as "Col. N. Burke." Un-

fortunately, however, Burke was never known to wear a cocked hat or curly side-whiskers in his life, and moreover was not a colonel at this time, and did not serve at Buena Vista, being several hundred miles off in another part of Mexico; so we may fairly set this portrait down as not authentic.

I take the opportunity of expressing my thanks to Mr. W. P. Saunders, Librarian of the State Society of Antiquarian Research, to Mr. Lyman Alcott, President of the Pioneers' Association, and to Mr. Benjamin Howard of the *Daily Press* for their kindness in allowing and assisting me to examine the records of their societies and the back-files of the *Press;* to Mr. Samuel Gwynne Stevens and to Mr. Horace Gwynne, Jr., for the loan of family manuscripts, and to Miss Frances Burke for help in deciphering some of her grandfather's papers.

MARY S. WATTS.

CINCINNATI, OHIO,
April 1, 1908.

NATHAN BURKE

NATHAN BURKE

CHAPTER I

In which Mr. Burke begins the World

A man's memory, be it ever so exact and vigorous, is, at best, an unstable sort of tool, or, if that figure does not please, let me liken it to an unbiddable servant, forever fetching us the wrong thing, or refusing to fetch at all, or going capering off with a childish futility, on some backward trail, led by a sound, a scent, a passing glance. As I sat here, addressing myself to the more or less serious task of recording Nathan Burke's career and history, and quite resolute to begin where all biographers should, at the beginning, my servant (to pursue the allegory) went clean distracted at the opening of a window near by, the entering fragrance of lilacs, and the view of a few blossoming fruit trees in a neighboring yard, shaken and dismantled by the sweet fresh gales of spring. These trifles sharply recalled another day, another spring, a yard not unlike this of my neighbor's, with just such a handsome sober house set in the middle of it; and looking out in the direction of the woodshed whence proceeded a lusty sound of whistling, I beheld, upon my soul, the living counterpart and image of Mr. Burke as he was upwards of forty years ago, in the person of the hired man jauntily swinging an axe upon a pile of stove wood! Burke chops a little decorously in his own woodshed nowadays for his health, and his own chore-boy smilingly humors the old gentleman, admires the symmetry of his kindlings, and pointedly expresses grave doubts whether he (the boy) could get through his duties without the general's stout assistance. He is unconscious that the latter, beneath a surface pleasantry, conceals reserves of gall; some day

Mr. Burke means to be revenged on this patronizing menial. Some day he will burst out and say: "Young man, when I was your age — which I take to be seventeen or so, by the exceedingly wide register of your rather unmanageable voice, and the vernal display of small blooms upon your countenance — yes, when I was two years younger, I was twice the chore-boy *you* are, for all your airs! I could milk a cow, or harness a horse, or fell a tree with any man in the county. To be sure I was only getting twelve dollars a month and my keep for all these accomplishments, whereas you *get* (you do not by any means *earn*) twenty-five or more — but times are changed. Flaccid product of civilization that you are — " the chore-boy will estimate this as some fearfully and wonderfully recondite "cuss-word" — "what are your recollections and experiences at seventeen compared to mine at the same age? An ignoble record of hooky-playing, orchard-robbing, surreptitious gambling and tobacco-smoking constitutes all your romance. Did *you* ever shoot deer with an old 'Tower' musket that was carried in the War of 1812? Did *you* ever go fishing and trapping with Jake Darnell — Jake Darnell who knew Mad Anthony Wayne, and had scouted with Daniel Boone? Go to! I'll lay a double eagle to a shin-plaster, sir, that you never even heard of the Alamo — I, I who speak to you, can remember when it *didn't* surrender!" The chore-boy will listen respectfully, and will afterwards be overheard remarking to the boy next door that he wouldn't wonder if th' old gin'ral was breakin' up fast, Hank. He don't ack nachul. You'd oughta heard him th' other day blowin' around 'bout what he used to could do when he was my size. 'Tain't like him, not a bit!

No, it would not be much like him, even in his present state of senile decrepitude, at the age of sixty odd; those words will never be spoken, as much for Burke's own sake as for yours, oh, pimpled, crowing, squeaking, awkward, kind-hearted chore-boy! Surely it is no longer ago than last month, last week, yesterday, that Nat Burke, pimpled, crowing, squeaking, awkward, and I hope kind-hearted even as you, was set down out of the farm wagon at Mr. William Ducey's gate on a spring morning, bright and windy even as this, to enter upon his first job. The doleful truth

is that it was in the year of Grace 183–; though, as Nat kept no journal of his daily doings at that time, his utmost accomplishment in the clerkly way being his own name — in print letters — the actual date of his arrival must remain unknown. He had got up at dawn, the cool, blowing, pink-skied dawn of an April day; from the tiny window in the peak of the cabin-loft that was Nat's bedchamber, and from the bench beside the back door, where with a bucket of icy well water he performed his toilet, the boy could see a bit of black bottom-land where wheat his own hand had sown last autumn was beginning to show tenderly; beyond were the flat shining links of the river and the woody slopes of its farther bank. The trees were still leafless; they lay like a wreath of smoke about the landscape, pricked out with purple here and there where the red buds were coming into bloom. The service-bush had sprung to life, miraculously, over night, and now timidly shook out a handful of its frail green-white blossoms on the edge of the deadening. A thousand odors, growth and decay commingled, starting grass and rotting leaves, were in the air; a kind of newness in the feel of the stable-mire under foot as Nathan went squelching through it. Moisture that was not frost, but real dew, like the dew of summer, glistened on the fence rails, on the shingles of the cabin and its environing sheds and lean-tos. They were not rich in architectural detail, and Nathan knew them as he knew the lines of his palm; since he was born he had opened and closed his eyes morning and evening upon a scene that varied only with the seasons. To-day he was conscious of no more acute vision than at other times; knowingly, at least, he made no effort to impress the kind and homely picture on his memory. Yet to the end of his life he will remember it as he saw it then: the logs of the cabin chinked with clay, the smoke from its chimney, the squirrel that chittered on the fence, the tapped sugar-maple hard by, with a little wooden gutter to lead the sap into the broken crock between its roots, the bird that sent a ringing call from its topmost branches, the very look and motion of the old mare by the straw-rick, still shaggy with her winter coat, raising her wise head to watch him, her foal staring not at all wisely for a moment, then flinging up its knock-kneed legs in an inane caracole and circling around

in a fit of coltish good spirits. Is it because on this morning Nathan began the world? He put the event to himself in no such high, resounding terms; he would have told you concisely — for he was not then and never became a particularly free talker — that he had got a job by the month, choring for Mr. William Ducey. And as to entering upon his career, Nat would scarcely have supposed that splitting kindlings, washing carriages, making gardens, and cutting grass merited so fine a name; for all that, the day and scene abide monumentally among his recollections, and have outlasted a score of others better worth remembering.

It was some fifteen miles to town, which Nathan proposed to trudge between sunrise and eight o'clock. At this season the back-country road would be none of the best, as he knew; in places along the river-bottoms it would be almost knee-deep in mud. But to cross over to the east and take the State Road would mean an extra five miles, and he would not gain enough either in time or ease of walking to make it worth his while. Without doubt he liked the river road, stones and mud, hill and hollow, a deal better. It had been a trail in Indian days, and they were not so distant, nor the frontier itself so remote in the thirties but that some hint of the pioneer's wild and bloody romance might yet hang about his ancient path to attract the feet of a boy. Indeed, Nathan loved his river with the shy and speechless sentiment of his fifteen years; he had been born and brought up on its banks, had fished and hunted along its every turn, gone swimming in its every basin; even its pretty and flowing Indian name obscurely charmed him. To this day he calls it to mind with a sort of pleasant pang; he has seen the Niagara and the Mississippi, and the streams of many great lands — but are not the Scioto and the Olentanjy, rivers of Ohio, better than all alien waters?

So Nat, the route decided upon, set about his preparations cheerily; they were not very elaborate, for they consisted mainly in the handy looping together on a leather thong of his one pair of cowhide boots, so that they might hang around his neck, and not impede his walking by being on his feet. It was quite warm enough, in Nat's opinion, to go without boots, and when he got near town, where it behooved him to make a dressy appearance, he would put them on.

The rest of his wardrobe — a clean calico shirt and a pair of knit yarn socks — he carried in a bundle. He had hesitated a little about taking his gun, that same famous old musket that had belonged to his father, and had smote Britishers, hip and thigh, and redskins likewise in Tecumseh's battles, not to mention all its other heroic and notable deeds, before Nathan was born; it seemed as if there would be no especial point in lugging this formidable piece of artillery about amongst the supine population of the city. What possible use could Mr. Ducey's hired man have for a gun? Yet he was loath to leave it; he had for it the unreasoning fondness that every one must feel for a faithful tool. And while he was turning the question in his mind, Mrs. Williams settled it for him once for all, by taking the weapon down from where it hung on the cabin wall out of reach of the children, and handing it to him half an hour later, beautifully swabbed and polished, the lock oiled, the barrel rubbed until the delicate arabesque traceries upon the steel quivered with reflections in the sun like a riffle in the Scioto. "Better not load it, Nathan," was all she said. "S'long as you're goin' where there's folks."

"I wasn't goin' to take it — I thought mebbe they'd be skeered of me," said Nathan, thanking her awkwardly.

"I guess not — anybody that had any sense'd know th' kind of boy *you* are," said Mrs. Williams, briefly. "It was yer pa's gun, an' you'd oughter have it — you ain't got much. An' ther's no use leavin' it here to git knocked 'round, cuz you won't ever come back."

"Why, yes, I will so. I'm goin' to come back some day — some day *soon*," declared the boy, surprised. She gave a kind of negative twitch with her head and shoulders, and turned back to the skillet of pork frying over the coals. The wide glare from the hearth beat upon her gaunt, big-boned frame, the lank folds of her faded print dress, the gnarled hand she put up to shade her eyes as she stooped over her task. She was not yet thirty, as Nathan knew, but she had hardly a tooth left and looked as old as Methuselah, as old as her own mother, old woman Darce, sitting yonder in the chimney-corner mumbling the stem of her pipe. It was difficult to believe that either one of them could ever have been a girl like Jake Darnell's Nance, for instance — she was almost

the only girl whom Nathan knew, and he pondered over the comparison, eying Mrs. Williams gravely. For the first time in his life it occurred to him to wonder that all women should be either pretty young girls or weather-beaten and broken old hags; in his experience of the sex there were only the two varieties. Thirty seemed to him then a prodigious antiquity; he was vaguely sorry for Mrs. Williams. Perhaps some conception of the sad ugliness of her existence entered the boy's mind; she would have been the last person in the world to pity herself, but suddenly Nathan perceived a painful unfairness in the fact that here he was going away to the city with all its wonders — for, after all, the city is the city, and even for a hired man, even for a sober-thinking lad like Nat Burke, replete with diversions and novelties — and poor Mrs. Williams must stay on changelessly, doing the same work, seeing the same things, day after day, year in and year out. In later times Burke recalled with some amusement the brilliant perspective this fifteen-mile journey opened for him; but fifteen miles in those days was to the backwoods as a hundred now; and for that matter it still seems to me that in every journey, even in the last great journey of all, he that travels has the best of it, and the heartache is to those that are left behind.

Nat went out and conscientiously fed and watered the stock on this last morning, brought in a pail of milk, and drew one of water for Mrs. Williams, according to his wont. 'Liph Williams, observing this, commented jocosely upon it as they sat down to breakfast. "Thought ye was Ducey's hired man now, Nat," he said. "Changed yer mind, hey? *I* can't give ye no twelve dollars a month, y'know. Yer keep's all ye've been wuth to me *so* far. So ye'd better think twicet, and not carry no more water, ner milk no more cows than ye hev' to."

"'Tain't nothin' but what I'd orter do, 'long as I ain't goin' to be here after this," said Nathan, somewhat abashed. "I done it fer — fer good-by. That old well's pretty hard to git water up from — fer womenfolks, I mean."

Williams laughed. "Ye wanter look out, Nathan; ye're th' kind that gits put upon."

"Th' well's all right, Nathan. 'Tain't no trouble fer *me*," said Mrs. Williams, harshly. She got up hastily from the

table and began to clatter among her pots and pans, turning her back on the company. Nat was so far from suspecting that anybody could possibly miss him, or feel a regret at his going, that, noticing her flushed face and puffy eyelids a little while after when he took his leave, he set them down to the heat of the fire over which she had been bending. It was not a tragic farewell; the struggle — itself stern and serious enough — for a mere living among backwoods folk almost exhausted their capacity for emotion; they had little leisure for the expression of either joy or sorrow, pain or pleasure. The great and moving events of life came to them like the seasons of the year; and their hard philosophy recognized that these things, like the seasons, whether good or bad, were ineluctable yet sure to change. Whatever tenderness Mrs. Williams felt for Nathan, whatever rough friendship had grown up between the boy and 'Liph during the years of their life together, not one of them would have been able to give it voice; the purple patch would have disconcerted them all. "Wish ye luck, Nat," the farmer said shortly, yet with a real kindness, and went off to his plough. So fine a morning could not be wasted in useless ceremonies; almost before Nathan had reached the road he could hear 'Liph shouting lustily behind his horses in the corn-field back of the cabin. Mrs. Williams, however, came to the door, and watched him as he strode confidently away. "He won't ever come back, 'cep'n mebbe to see us oncet," she said aloud. "Well —" she went resolutely into the house. Nat himself, to be truthful, departed without much of a pang. He had some trouble in ordering back the dog, who came bouncing after him under the mistaken impression that a gun and a bundle meant, as usual, all day in the woods, and perhaps wild turkey or quail. He lacked the discernment to distinguish one game-season from another, or a musket from a shot-gun, and was confounded at the roughness of his welcome. Nathan had to stamp, to bawl furiously, finally to make the motion of stooping for a stone and throwing it (he had not the heart to perform that unkind and unjust action in reality) before the creature could understand him. It stopped still with its head on one side, eying him, tentatively wagging, grinning doggishly, and wrinkling its brows in interrogation; then retreated slowly, drooping and reproachful.

Nat went on in a kind of sober lightness of heart; he was a quiet boy, and, even at fifteen, felt no disposition to celebrate his entrance into manhood — for was he not Ducey's hired *man?* — by any undue demonstrations. Another boy in his place might have been whistling and shying pebbles at the robins and squirrels; but Nathan was too much of a sportsman for the latter amiable pursuit; if he took the trouble to notice a squirrel or robin at all, it was because he meant to shoot it for supper. And as to whistling, he could not carry a tune to save his life, and his whistle resembled in strength and melody the sound made by an ungreased cart-wheel. Knowing the distance he must go, he settled down into the long, ungraceful lope of the backwoodsman, which gets over the ground with amazing rapidity and the least possible fatigue; and in an hour or so sighted Jake Darnell's cabin on the bluff above the river. There was smoke coming from the chimney, but no other sign of activity about the raw, littered yard, or the neglected corn-patch by the roadside, although the day was already pretty well advanced according to Nathan's reckoning. Approaching he caught a gleam of scarlet by the door and saw Nance feeding half a dozen hens from a pan of corn-meal mush. Nathan paused, not at the gate for there was none, but in an angle of the sagging rail fence, and Nance came slowly towards him, shooing the chickens from under her feet.

"Goin'?" she queried without other salutation, taking in at a single flashing glance the boots, the gun, the bundle, and the import of all three. She put down the pan on a convenient stump, leaned against it with her arms folded, kicked a chicken out of the way, and surveyed Nathan from top to toe keenly. "When d'ye 'low ye'll git to Ducey's, Nat?"

"'Bout th' middle of th' forenoon, I expect. Yer pap wouldn't be goin', would he? He said he might need powder 'n' shot by this time."

"Well, he don't," said Nance, decisively. She cast a sharp look over her shoulder at the house. "Did ye wanter see him?"

"Not unless he's handy," Nathan said. "I — I thought I'd jest like to say thanky to him for gittin' me th' place with Duceys. I ain't had a chance to tell him so. Hadn't 'a' been fer him, I don't guess they'd ever known anything 'bout me."

"Oh, I reckon pap didn't strain himself," said Nance. "Ye're welcome to whatever he done er said. Ye can't see him this mornin', anyhow. He's plumb full — full's a tick. Come home last night so's he couldn't hardly stand up. I hed to make him a kinder pallet on th' floor. Ye know he's been up in Hardin County shootin', an' he got a kinder runty little she-deer, wan't much bigger'n a six-weeks calf — th' way they git along towards th' end of th' winter, y'know — an' he took and sold it fer three dollars over at th' cross-roads, an' come home with most of it inside him, I guess; leastways they wan't but two bits in his pockets when I went through 'em. I've seen him wuss drunk, though; he'll be out of it by sundown, 'cordin' to th' signs. *I* know him." She gave these data with a sort of detached almost professional unconcern, and finished with a wide hearty yawn, showing a row of teeth small, even, and white, like grains of Indian corn. "I git sorter tired, times, settin' up waitin' fer him," she explained, with no slightest trace of complaint in her tone, however.

Nathan looked at her with a feeling remotely akin to pity. He must have been in something of a melting mood that morning, for he had never before given any consideration to the lot or character of Mrs. Williams, of Nance Darnell, of anybody on earth, even himself. At this distance of time I cannot judge the boy impartially; yet I like to think that some humane and kindly spirit was beginning to stir faintly within him. "It's kinder hard on ye, Nance, hevin' yer pa git drunk so often —"

"Why? He never lays a hand on me," said the girl. The red flushed hotly over her dark, rich-colored face; her big black eyes blazed; she looked at Nathan almost vengefully. "He's as good as gold, pap is; whoever says he ain't, lies! I'd a heap ruther hev' pap drunk than some other folks' fathers sober, *I* tell ye!"

"I didn't mean that way," said Nathan, clumsily, a little cloudy in his own mind as to what he *did* mean. "I wasn't sayin' anything agin yer father — he's too good a friend to me fer that. Only seems as if you'd be better off if he didn't take too much, times."

"Well, it's nat'ral to a man to drink, I guess," said Nance, tolerantly. "Don' know how you're goin' to stop 'em. Pap

ain't like some, swillin' jest fer th' *taste*. He don't keer nothin' 'bout th' taste — he jest does it to feel good. Pap ain't no hog."

There appeared to Nathan also a species of distorted virtue in this trait of Jake Darnell's. He was nowise amused or taken aback by Nance's fierce loyalty, although there were other times when he could not comprehend the girl. The very next moment she surprised him by bursting out with: "Oh, Nathan, ain't th' day jest — jest — !" In default of vocabulary she made a sweeping gesture with her lithe strong arms, and drew in a long breath. "Seems like I could jest *holler*, 'cause I'm alive! Look at th' sarvis-bush over there. Say, do you know what it puts me in mind of? It puts me in mind of a little Injun girl hidin' an' peekin' an' kinder 'fraid to come out."

"You always hev' such fancy notions, Nance," said the boy, wonderingly.

"I dunno what makes me hev' 'em — mebbe everybody does, only they don't come out an' *say* 'em like I do," she said and laughed, giving him a quick conscious glance. In fact, Nance with her odd violent changes of mood, her spurts of temper, her open display of feeling, was an exotic figure amongst her surroundings; and Nathan, as narrow as was his experience, was already dimly aware of it. Mrs. Williams, he thought, might indeed have been a girl once, but could she ever have been a girl like Nance Darnell?

"Mis' Williams is real sorry ye're goin', Nat," she said, hitting neatly upon the subject of his thoughts by one of those uncanny chances with which we are all familiar. "She was cryin' th' other day when we was talkin' 'bout it. She 'lowed she set as much store by you, 's 'f you was her own son."

Nathan crimsoned and stuttered, incoherent with surprise. He felt the shock of pleasure succeeded by a potent anxiety with which we make the discovery that somebody is fond of us; it is a responsibility to have somebody fond of you.

"I'm goin' to come back an' see you all every time I git a chance," he said. "I told her so."

"S'posin' ye don't git th' place after all, Nat? S'posin' Ducey's hired somebody else?"

"Oh, I don't reckon he'd do that," said Nathan, confi-

dently. "He told yer pap he was set on gittin' a reg'lar country-boy that'd know all 'bout country-*things*, so's he wouldn't hev' to teach him nothin'. I guess that's *me*. I don't know nothin' else," he added humorously. "When yer pap's in town, he'll come 'round an' see me, won't he?"

"If he don't git nothin' to drink first," said Nance. "Next time he goes I'm goin' with him. I kin keep him straight. 'Cause, ye know, he always gives me th' money right off that he gits fer th' quail, er rabbit, er th' varmints' pelts he's got to sell, an' then I spend it fer what we need. That's th' only way to do with pap — jest spend his money before he gits holt of a whiskey-jug, er they won't be any *to* spend. I found out that quick's I commenced goin' to town with him. That was last year some time, y'know. I been three-four times here lately."

Nathan was interested; he had been only once himself. "Did ye ever see Mr. Ducey, Nance?"

She nodded. "Lord, yes! Pap goes to th' store every time he's got anything to sell, you know. 'Tain't Ducey's store, it's Mr. Marsh's, too; leastways th' old man is gin'rally 'round somewheres. I guess he does most of the tradin'. I've seen Mis' Ducey, too, Nathan." Her face lit up with the recollection. It was another of those outbreaks of enthusiasm that so transfigured Nance; her eyes glowed; there was something at once brilliant and tender in her expression. "Oh, Nathan, you'd oughter see her! Never mind — you're goin' to. My, I wisht it was me! She's jest —" again the lack of words defeated her. "She's got blue eyes, an' th' least little teenty hands — like a coon's paws, only they're white 'stid of black — white like snow — but kinder cunnin' that same way coons' paws is, I mean. An' her hair jest as yaller, an' fine like corn-silk!" She paused in a strange ecstacy of admiration. Nathan was too accustomed to her to be greatly impressed by this flight; he had seen her crazed in the same fashion over a nest of birds' eggs, a pet calf, a wild rose in bloom — any one of a dozen headlong fancies. The phrase is misleading; for, as Nathan came to recognize in later years, not the least curious thing about Nance was that she was steadfast in her wild devotion and clung heroically to her idols.

"Well, if I'm ever to see Mis' Ducey, I'd better be gittin'

along, I think," he said, and fell back a step or two into the road. "Good-by, Nance. Tell yer pap I stopped in to tell him thanky, will you?"

"Pap didn't do nothin'," repeated the girl, "'cep'n jest say he knowed a good stiddy boy that could shoot er ketch fish ekal to himself, and —"

"No! Did he say that?" said Nathan, pleased. Then he grinned. "I dunno as that's jest what Ducey wants," he remarked; "but Jake done what he could fer me, anyhow."

He swung into the road; and Nance returned to her chicken-feeding, and the other housewifely duties that somehow suited her so ill, although she performed them briskly and capably enough. Where his path crossed the next bit of rising ground, Nathan looked back and caught the flicker of her red calico gown glancing like a flame about the dark interior of the cabin.

CHAPTER II

In which Mr. Burke's Pedigree comes under Discussion

When the city of Monterey fell to the American arms in September of 1846, and General Ampudia marched out, there was found among the sick and disabled left behind (according to the Mexican habit) an Irish officer of Torrejon's staff, who had been wounded by a musket-ball in the thigh while assisting — with the most signal courage and resolution — in the defence of the redoubt they called *Rincon del Diablo*, on the second day of the fighting. That he was of an alien race need surprise nobody, for his country has sent just such soldiers of fortune, brave, able, shiftless, and light-hearted, to every army on the face of the globe. This gentleman's name was Bourke, and he happened to be taken up and cared for by an officer of one of the United States volunteer regiments for whom he subsequently professed — and without doubt sincerely felt at the time — the warmest gratitude and affection. "We arre — we *must* be — related, an' the ties of blood arre sthrong, me bye," he would say touchingly — indeed with tears in his eyes — after the third or fourth tumbler of that raw brandy of the country which the sutlers somehow found means, against the severest penalties, to smuggle into camp; "ye were dthrawn to me at wance, an' me to you. To be sure, I'd as soon have expicted to meet an Irishman named Abednego as wan named Nathan, but ye were doubtless christened from the other side of the house." And on the strength of this kinship, he borrowed Captain Burke's money, wore his clothes, rode his horse, and made himself free of his quarters in a style which the captain would scarcely have looked for from an own brother. If this authority was to be believed, the Bourke or Burke family made their appearance on this planet some time prior to Adam and Eve, Nathan's immediate ancestors came to Amer-

ica with Christopher Columbus — "and bedad, Nat, your forefathers were kings in Connaught whin Prisident Polk's were swingin' be their tails!" To which Captain Burke replied rather dryly that as between swinging by the tail and swinging by the neck, he was quite certain which he should choose; but that the Burkes of antiquity might have swung by both ends for aught he knew, being ignorant even of their names. Of recent years, Nathan, recalling the conversation, has wondered once or twice where this exile of Erin got his Darwinian figure of speech, as the theory was not generally familiar in that day; but it is too late to ask him now. After the exchange of prisoners he disappeared from Burke's horizon, and when last heard of, had taken service with the Khedive; he may be a dey, a bey, a pasha of ever so many *tails* by this time.

Mr. Burke never gave a thought to following up that shadowy relationship, nor felt much desire to investigate the family-tree, which, judging by this and sundry other specimens of what it bears, must be a somewhat decayed and tottering old vegetable at the present date. For a good many years of his life — until, in fact, he was a man grown and certain events had caused the matter of birth and descent to assume larger proportions in his view — Nathan knew only that his father's name was John Burke, his mother's, Mary Granger; the responsibility of a family reputation was one which he never had to support, for no boy was ever more alone in the world. Mary Burke died the day after her only child was born; the father was drowned while spearing fish through the ice on the Scioto River when Nathan was a bare two years old. Like everybody else in the settlement, they came from somewhere in the older States — Pennsylvania — Virginia — nobody could say with certainty; the pioneers, unless they chanced to have migrated from the same place, seldom knew much about one another's antecedents, and had no leisure to inquire. Nathan could remember neither of these parents, nor any home except that of 'Liph Williams, who had added the fatherless and motherless child to his own already numerous brood, from no affection nor sense of duty, for Nathan had not the least claim upon him, but out of that abounding rough charity and generosity characteristic of his class. The Williamses were poor, hard-

working people, but they took Nat in, fed him, clothed him, nursed him through half a dozen childish ailments, did their simple best for him without ever asking or expecting recompense. The thing is not unusual; it happens every day. Poor Tom dies and poorer Dick promptly takes up the burden of Tom's widow and children; lame Harry stumbles into the ditch, and some ragged Samaritan hauls him out; yonder beggar shares his crust with somebody, if it be only a dog, and gnaws with a greater relish for having done so. Let the cynics who refuse to see aught of admirable or touching in the spectacle of humanity so great, so little, so mean, so noble, so infinitely laughable and pathetic, let them listen to one man at least who has found the world the best and kindest of places, and met with a thousand good turns for one evil.

So now the truth is out, and we are come at last to that proper beginning of an autobiography I promised on the first page. I think too highly of Nathan Burke's descendants to suppose for a moment that they could be ashamed of the discovery that their grandfather at the outset of his career was a coarse country boy, barely able to count, not over-familiar with the spelling-book, wholly ignorant of what we call manners, the small courtesies of which we profess to make so little, yet which we, in our hearts, respect so much. But the feeling with which I myself look back upon those years is, I fear, not untinged with shame. I had as lief have begun life with a more elaborate equipment, and often think: to what heights had I not climbed, could I have had a better start! It is a feebleness I share with many, weak and strong. There was a wise Frenchman who once said: "I do not know what the heart of a rascal may be. I know what the heart of an honest man is; it is horrible." I humbly trust mine is not so; yet I know that of myself which I should shrink and wither up at the mere notion of confessing to any one. Yes, I have waked at night, and cringed among the bedclothes, and blushed in the darkness, and tossed my respectable old gray head upon the pillow at the recollection of those moments of weakness, those sneaking faults and follies. Is there a man on earth who has not done the like? If I ask my children to spare me the recital of these things, I do not ask them to believe me perfect. In the autobiographies of fiction —

to say nothing of some real ones[1] — they get enough of dreary virtuous twaddle from the hero, enough of preposterous sham unconsciousness to stale their taste for perfection, it seems to me. Let us have an end of all the mouthing and attitudinizing; the best of us can be no better than a plain man that tries to do his duty. There was a fashion — now, happily, on the wane — of writing about our American deeds and men as if both were not only above censure but almost too high for praise. All our orators were Demosthenes — all our lawgivers Solon — all our generals Napoleon. I remember somebody published about the year '55 a short account of Mr. Polk's administration, containing the following sketch of General Worth, whom I knew slightly in Mexico. My friend, James Sharpless, having come upon it in the course of his reviewing for the *Daily News*, brought it to me, acridly smiling, with pencillings about the paragraph, marking it down for slaughter: "He possessed the ardor and impetuosity of Murat, the bravery and inflexible determination of Ney, the ability and judgment of Massena, and the bearing and frankness of Macdonald." "Murat, Ney, Massena, Macdonald! *Whew!!!*" Jim wrote underneath it. Worth himself already abode in decent silence under the monument in Madison Square with "Honor the brave" above his gallant old bones; he would have been the first to laugh at that *Whew* of Jimmie's, I think. What did the fluent author of that gust of rhetoric know of Murat or Ney? Nothing at all; this braying and bragging was in the taste of the day, and all of us did not approve of it, we still had to stand it. The habit of fustian was something worse than comical or contemptible; it wrought an actual harm, as I have found out since entering upon this task. There have been whole shelves, whole libraries of histories and biographies of those times written, not one word of which, I swear, is free from suspicion; pages of clap-trap sentiment, tin-foil eloquence, cheap, glittering bombast, alternate with pages of misstatements and inaccuracies. An honest man burns with shame at the reading. Twiggs was the Hero of This, Pierce was the Hero of

[1] In the margin Burke has written: "Just finished reading Winfield Scott's autobiog. All bosh. *And some of it d——d lies!*" He had an extraordinary and entirely unjust prejudice against General Scott; the journal shows it repeatedly. — M. S. W.

That, your humble servant, very likely, was the Hero of T'other. As if any one of us did more than his position and his own self-respect called upon him to do, or was one whit more heroic than the plainest private in his regiment! My classic learning is too scanty to assure me if the Muse of History is represented with a trumpet; but if so, the lady had better exchange it for a pair of spectacles, to my notion. Burke's children, at least, shall not be left to read this windy rubbish and imagine it reflects what either the American people at large, or the hard, brave, simple men I knew, thought and believed.

Were it not, indeed, for the opinions expressed with somewhat of volcanic warmth in that last paragraph, I am uncertain that I should have undertaken so solemn a business as this writing at all. My grandson, — and much I doubt whether *he* will ever weary through his grandfather's autobiography! — being a brisk youngster of six or thereabouts, has been enjoined not to make a noise when he observes me to be busied with the pen. The prohibition is more severe upon me than him, for whereas he frequently forgets it altogether, I have it constantly in mind that I am playing the ungracious part of a grandfatherly bogie, especially made for the blighting of little boys. He sometimes inquires with an appearance of interest which by no means deceives me, how long it will be before the "story" is finished, and if it tells about when I was only as big as he, and did I kill Indians when I was "in the woods"? This fulfils his ideal of a career and a hero, and I grieve both to disappoint him and to lose prestige in his eyes. But, sad to say, the Indians were all dead and gone in that part of the world before my day, though they were active and virulent enough elsewhere farther west and in the south; and there will be no tomahawking, nor warwhooping to enliven the page. The Nat Burke I knew when he was our little Nat's age slept safe and sound and removed from all danger of losing his young scalp in the loft over the Williamses' cabin, with three or four of the Williams lads for bedfellows. He wore 'Liph's old pantaloons cut down to suit his own small shanks; he got up at dawn and went to bed with the chickens; he greatly delighted in cornmeal mush fried in cakes and eaten with maple-syrup. He trudged three miles to the district school — when there was

a teacher — and three miles back; and I am afraid did not profit to a high degree by these intermittent journeys to the fountain-head of learning. He esteemed much the privilege of going hunting with Jake Darnell — and, in fact, it was a privilege and a lesson in the antique and noble art of the woodsman which Jake did not accord to every boy. Many people would have considered that profane and drunken old Nimrod not the choicest associate in the world for a growing child; but, even in the worst sodden stages of his favorite vice, where, alas, Nathan saw him often enough, I cannot think his company harmed the lad. The breath of the backwoods is pure; there was, when all was said, something fine and clean and becoming to a man in the primitive ways by which Darnell got his living. And if his example did not teach Nathan industry and self-control, I ask you, in fairness, is there any example that does teach them? The seed may, perhaps, be sown, but you and I must be the gardeners. Jake had known Nat's father and mother; he had for Nat himself one of those unaccountable fancies, fanatically enthusiastic, yet steady and enduring, to which his daughter Nance was so prone; he was as pleased the day Nat shot his first wild turkey, and as absurdly proud of that feat, as the boy himself. According to his simple views he predicted great things for his young companion. "I'll make a scout of ye," he used to say in moments of elation; "ye got jest th' eye fer it, Nathan, jest th' eye, an' th' nerve. 'Tain't jest grit fer fightin', I mean — any fool's got that; its patience, an' it's th' know-*how*, an' th' know-*when* — them's what counts. *Coureur de bois*, that's what they call 'em up north-a-way, up to th' Lakes. I been there. That's French, what I said jest now; I kin talk it, y'know. Ye got to — an' talk Injun too — two-three kinds of Injun talk — if you're scoutin'. Yes — oh, Lord, yes, I been there. Ever tell ye 'bout Fort Meigs? Ever tell ye 'bout Fort Stephenson? It's twenty year this summer. Th' Gin'ral — Gin'ral Harrison — sent me down th' Sandusky River with a letter to Major Croghan that was commanding at Fort Stephenson — 'twan't nothin' but a foot er two o' dirt bank, an' a stockade with th' poles wide 'nough 'part fer to stick th' bar'l of yer rifle through! I went down in a canoe with two other men, one of 'em was a half-breed we called Long Joe —"

"Was they Injuns in th' road?" interrupts his eager audience.

"Injuns? God! Yes, woods bilin' with 'em. That half-breed I was tellin' ye about, they got him — shot him an' sculped him. That's Injun way, ye know. I ain't ever held it up agin 'em. Injuns is Injuns. I've seen plenty white men wan't any whiter actin' than Tecumthe — I knew him well. An' as fer taking sculps, th' Injuns ain't th' only ones — th' British useter give a bounty fer 'em those days. After they killed Joe, like I told ye, th' other man — I plumb fergit his name — and I, we kep' on. He wan't hurt, but he was took kinder silly with th' heat er sumthin' — 'twas hotter 'n hell, long 'bout th' first week in July. I ric'lect how he went along singin' an' laffin' — 'twas all I c'ld do to keep him at th' paddle. An' me squattin' in th' stern with th' rifle. Th' river was low, like it gits in a hot spell, an' oncet or twicet we hed to git out fer a kinder portage where they was these little muddy islands — an' him a-laffin' an' a-singin' th' hull time! I swanny that was th' longest fifteen mile I ever made in my time; 'peared like I'd orter been gray-headed an' toothless time we git to th' eend of it! An' when we got to th' fort an' giv' th' letter to Croghan, what d'ye s'pose it said? Why, fer him to light right out — quit — *retreat* up th' river as quick's he c'ld, 'count o' Proctor bein' in front of him with th' British troops — 'twas th' Forty-first Rig'ment, I remember — an' two thousand Injuns on his flank. Two thousan', that's what I'd jest come through, mind you. I ain't much on figgers, but take m' oath they wan't any two thousand of 'em. God! I never give a red fer William Henry Harrison from that day to this. Any man that'd fit with Injuns half his nat'ral life had orter have knowed ye can't git any two thousand redskins together an' *keep* 'em together — not even Tecumthe couldn't do it, ner Brandt ner Red Jacket ner any of their own kind, let alone any white man. You'd orter seen Croghan when he read th' letter. I went in to where he was settin' in his shirt and breeches — 'twas sweatin' hot, like I told you. I dunno why we always called Croghan 'little,' less'n 'twas becuz he was such a young feller. He wan't much over twenty — jest a boy — jest a big tall lanky boy like they breed 'em down in Kaintuck — that's where he come from. 'You tell th' gin'ral I'm

here, an' by God, here I stay!' he said to me. Lord! I remember like it was yesterday. They was a Injun woman — a right good-lookin' young squaw — settin' in th' corner o' th' cabin plattin' a basket. Thar she sot an' platted, like a stone image, an' never even looked up at Croghan swearin' an' damnin' an' stridin' up an' down, bitin' his finger-nails."

"An' did he sure 'nough stay?" asks the boy, with shining eyes.

"Oh, yes, he stayed — yes, little Georgie stayed. They was 'bout a hundred an' thirty of us at th' last — in th' fight, I mean, when Proctor sent up th' Forty-first agin us. They was more men 'n that inside th' stockade, but mostly sick — fever 'n ager — so's they couldn't fight. Some of 'em did, anyhow. I ric'lect I was chillin' myself regular, but, by criminy, th' fight come on my off day!" — He chuckled at this as if it had been the finest joke in the world. — "How'd th' fight begin? Why, it begun like this: th' British gin'ral hed a man — what they call a non-commissioned orficer, y'know — to come up to th' fort under a white flag, with two-three Injuns an' some soldiers with him, an' he giv a letter to Croghan with 'Come out from behind yer little Tom-fool breastworks, er I'll blow ye to kingdom come,' in it — not jest them words, but put kinder civil-like, ye unnerstan'. An' Major Croghan he sent back word: 'Blow an' be damn, then!' That was all th' way it begun. 'Twas kinder like what they say 'bout a short horse soon curried. An' what we done to 'em, Nat, what we done to 'em —! That fool Britisher hadn't no better sense 'n to march his men in three columns right up agin th' stockade. They come right up, right up agin our rifles they come — braver men I never see. I swanny, 'twas a shame!" He would fall silent, with his strong old yellow fangs clenched on the pipe-stem as they sat by the fire glimmering under the lee of a log in some twilight nook of woods. "Did *you* kill any of 'em, Jake?" the boy would ask him. To which he sometimes made answer with an unwonted diffidence or indirection that powder 'n shot come pretty durn high them days, an' ye couldn't afford to waste none. "But did ye ever kill a man fer certain sure, an' see him fall?" Nat persisted. But though it was hardly possible to doubt that in the trade of war Jake had slain men, from some obscure reason — it may well have

been a'sort of tribute in its way to the other's youth and to his own dim notions of what was decent and humane — he would never acknowledge it in plain words. "I reckon ye've seen me aim — at squirrels an' such, ain't ye?" he once said after Nathan had pressed him pretty close about the battle of the River Raisin; "yes, you've seen me aim plenty times, I guess. Ever see me miss?" "No," said the youngster, puzzled. "Well, I aimed."

Even at his drunkest he was still thus uncommunicative; being, in fact, one of those obdurate topers who grow more and more silent as the bottle lowers. He never drank while actually in the pursuit of game, when he was capable of going twenty-four hours, perhaps longer, without food or even water; nor did he ever offer Nat a sip, or allow him to carry the flask. Nathan used to go to sleep curled up under the ragged and foul old army-blanket that served them for bed on these expeditions, leaving Darnell sitting cross-legged by the fire, smoking and musing, with the bottle between his knees, and the light playing redly over his hard, weather-beaten features and high 'coonskin cap. And anon, the boy, who was an alert sleeper, would start from his dreams just in time to grab Jake away from the bed of coals, where he seemed to have an ingrained propensity to tumble the moment the last drop was drained. He never objected to Nathan's rude ministrations, or became either hilarious or maudlin or violent; the liquor affected him (I have since thought) much as opium might, reducing him to a kind of pleasant torpor. Once in a rare moment of confidence, for he was not much given to talking directly about himself, he told the boy that he had "beautiful dreams" when he was drunk — "beautiful," he repeated with a vague look and gesture. Heaven knows what they could have been, poor old Jake! Perhaps, after all, the mutual responsibility of their companionship was good for the man, and not entirely harmful for the boy.

As I remember him, however, Nat came very early to a sense of responsibilities and obligations. It would be impossible to say at what age it was borne in upon him that he was living upon the bounty of strangers, beholden to their good-will for the bite he ate, the clothes on his back, the roof over his head. When I look back now, it seems as if he must

have been born with that knowledge and with the determination to even the score. Yet I know that he was merely an ordinarily bright lad of an industrious and conscientious disposition; there were thousands like Nathan Burke growing up all over the country. If he hoed the garden and milked the cows and lent a hand to hanging out Mrs. Williams's wash a trifle more willingly and consistently than the other boys, it must have been due, first of all, to some innate distaste for idleness and only in secondary degree to that desire to be "worth his keep" at which I have hinted. 'Liph and his wife were too good-hearted to thrust his dependence in his face; they were assuredly not conscious of making any difference between him and their own children; and Nat himself was not at all quicker or cleverer or better-looking than 'Liph junior or any of the rest. He did, indeed, display more aptitude for learning; but that was the result of a sort of abstract talent for application. He had a fancy for slogging away until the task was done, the thing, whatever it might be, accomplished; and, being set to get his letters out of an old almanac, got them with proportionate time and trouble, exactly as he would have achieved his stent at wood-chopping or what-not, undeterred by any desire to go fishing or berry-picking. With the almanac his literary labors may almost be said to have begun and ended; it came with certain bottles of a patent medicine, by name "Vaughn's Vegetable Lithontriptic Mixture." This remedy was a mighty favorite in its day, curing everything from chilblains to cholera — according to the universal habit of patent medicines. There never lacked a bottle on the chimney-piece; and to this day Mr. Burke observes a greater grace and skill in his capital *V's* than he can command in the making of any other letter.

All these details lack singularly in dash and color. A man who was born and brought up in a log-cabin sixty years ago should, in conscience, have learned to read out of the Bible, and studied lying on the floor winter nights, by the aid of a flaming pine knot. But there was no pine in the country; and although the Williamses possessed a Bible, Nathan, dreadful to confess, never felt the slightest curiosity to open one until years later! His limited acquaintance with Webster's spelling-book and Vaughn satisfied him. And up to the

spring day when Jake Darnell stopped 'Liph on the homeward road to tell him that he had got the place with Duceys for Nat on trial, nothing noteworthy had happened in the boy's whole life. Once on a three days' trip with Jake he had shot a deer; once he fished the Williams baby (the baby of the hour; there was a fresh one at regular intervals), a two-year-old girl, out of a pool of the Scioto, where she had fallen over her head, and carried her bawling to her mother — a feat for which he received a deal of unmerited gratitude and applause. And once he fell from the hay-loft and dislocated his shoulder. This last was a real event; 'Liph was called in from the fields to saddle one of the lumbering old plough-horses and journey in town, post-haste, for the doctor. He returned, not with the doctor, but instead with a long, gawky, big-nosed, young medical student who bandaged up the injured member after putting it in place with a dexterity and gentleness far surpassing that of any woman, so that for days and months afterwards Nathan remembered the very look and touch of his lean, clean, strong, steady hands. He dosed the family all around for chills and fever, laughed at the Lithontriptic Mixture, and told Mrs. Williams to throw it in the fire — and so took his departure much as he had come, like a gust of fresh air on a dull day. Nathan worked all summer helping Tim Pascoe build his dam to get the money wherewith to pay 'Liph; although, to be sure, the bill had not been large, but neither were a boy's wages in those days. To do him justice Williams took it with reluctance, even remonstrating with the lad: "Lord, I ain't needin' it — I ain't doggin' ye fer it, Nat," he said kindly. "'Twas doin' my work ye hurt yerself, anyhow."

"I want to pay it," said Nathan, stubborn and brief-spoken as usual.

He and Pascoe did not erect a monument more lasting than brass in that forlorn old dam; it was little more than a ridge of boulders and logs piled up across the river, constantly giving away with a devastating rush of water, and so low as to be quite beneath the surface during the spring freshets. It sufficed the Pascoes, who were a shiftless, improvident, happy-go-easy lot — yet I should speak more gently of them, for they are all dead this long while; and they were Nat Burke's friends; and, in fact, it was Tim Pascoe himself who

took Nathan up and brought him into town in his wagon the last five miles of the journey, and set him down, finally, at Mr. William Ducey's gate.

NOTE. Mr. James Sharpless, referred to in this chapter, died in 1906. He was at one time very prominent in his profession, and was the author of two books: "With the Argonauts; Studies and Sketches," Bayard Bros., San Francisco, 1875; and "Recollections of a Veteran Journalist," 2 vols., Sanford, Megrue & Co., Columbus, Ohio, 1886.

I went to see the old gentleman, in connection with this work, a little while before his death, and found him quite sprightly still, though much enfeebled in body at the advanced age of eighty-four years. He was very willing to talk about the general, of whom he spoke not at all sentimentally, but with the beautiful and touching affection which exists, it would seem, only between men. "Burke could have had any public office in this State, if he had chosen to go after it," he said to me; "but he always scouted the notion, and he used to tell me with a laugh that he was no orator as Brutus was — meaning me, Madame. He didn't like public speaking, you know; and he never had the slightest conception of his own personal popularity. Why, I remember there was a man here in town named Carrington — a hardware merchant, a very good sort of fellow — who looked something like Nathan and was often taken for him — which, I have no doubt, Carrington rather liked. But Nat remarked to me that it must be very annoying to Carrington to be continually spoken to for himself — 'and,' says he, perfectly simple and serious, 'it's the most extraordinary thing, Jim, but nobody ever takes me for Carrington!'" — M. S. W.

CHAPTER III

Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came

The Ducey house, like all the other city houses in Nathan's limited experience, seemed to him a prodigiously handsome and imposing edifice. It was brick; it was two stories high, with windows glittering in regular tiers of three across the front, and a front door with a fan-light above it and slips of glass along the sides, and a porch, and a flight of stone steps and a brass door-knob; it was set back in an ample yard of trees, flower-beds, and the beautiful blue-grass turf, well-nigh an extinct growth with us now, so common then that Nat, who perhaps did not possess much of an eye for natural beauties, scarcely noticed it. The approach was by a straight, brick-paved walk, where he was fated to spend more than one hot, toilsome hour, gouging out the weeds that sprouted periodically between every brick. Had he known it, the prospect would not have discouraged him; he never feared work; but it was with a good deal of inward tremor, proceeding mostly from anxiety as to whether he was going to "suit," that he went skreeking up the walk in his unaccustomed boots, and so around to the back door, following a hint of Pascoe's. "Th' help always comes in an' goes out that way," this sage had warned him; "th' front door's for *folks*, ye know." At the rear his heart was unexpectedly gladdened by the familiar spectacle of a wash-bench, milk-crocks sunning, the woodshed, and the grindstone. He beheld the features of his prospective kingdom; here was the stable, here a little garden-patch behind neat white palings; there was a carriage-house, and chicken-coops. None of this, perhaps, was pretty, but there was a homely grace of thrift, cleanliness, and order about the place that at once pleased and awed him. The boy felt a kind of dutiful eagerness to keep it all in that condition and better; he'd show them if they gave him the chance! All the

city yards, he had noticed as they came along, were kept thus tidy; the difference between them and the unlovely disorder — a disorder which sometimes had not even the excuse of being convenient — of the Williamses' surroundings had caught his eye. This, then, was the way in which city-folks liked things kept; — very good, give him a chance and he'd show them! The capital city of our State was not a large one in the early thirties; and Nathan did not suffer — as youth is poetically supposed to — in the transition to bricks and mortar from the wide, grave, silent spaces of his backwoods. Truth to tell, there was no such preponderance of the bricks and mortar; it was a pleasant little town, characterless and immature as most other middle western towns of its era; and doubtless there were double files of trees along the streets, and wide yards; and comfortable homes like that of the William Duceys, with tumbledown shanties next door. Perhaps the new Penitentiary loomed grimly on the confines where Nathan had entered; and it may be they were just laying the foundations of the Capitol, and tall derricks straddled above the recumbent stones in the square bounded by State and Broad streets, the square whereon the Ducey windows looked and met the morning sun. But so naïvely self-absorbed is youth, so strangely unobservant of its environment, so pathetically expectant of the eternal To-morrow, and oblivious of the eternal To-day, that when I sit down and straightly endeavor to call up a picture of the first city I ever knew, I find myself groping in a fog of formless memories. When people say to me, "Why, you recollect all about such a time or place — you were a boy then," I think within me, Good God, and what has become of that boy? He is dead — gone and irretrievable, along with those departed days. Challenge his memory, indeed! It is only with a strain and painful effort that I put aside the curtain of the years and call to him.

Nathan marched up to the back door and knocked; and was presently opened to by a comely, fresh-cheeked Irish girl, who started back with a truly Hibernian screech of mingled consternation and pleasurable excitement at view of this long-legged and shock-haired Corydon, gun in hand.

"It ain't loaded," Nathan assured her, detecting her affrighted glance; another woman, a fleshier and somewhat

older duplicate of the first, seated at the table hard by, joined in the flurry of giggles and broken ejaculations to all the saints. And Nat, seeing that his statement had produced no effect, walked in without further ceremony, announcing succinctly: "I've come to see about th' place for doin' chores. My name's Burke."

This covered the whole ground, and had the odd result of quieting and silencing the feminine uproar immediately, although Nathan had said it in no such intention; he merely wanted to make clear his position at once. The two women stared at him, and he faced them tranquilly. "Tell Mr. Ducey I'm here, ma'am, will you?" he said, addressing the nearest, straightforwardly. He had already decided inwardly that neither of these could be Nance's Mrs. Ducey — and whoever or whatever else they were he conceived to be no business of his. They exchanged a glance and wink; then both reddened and began to clatter confusedly amongst the dishes, as they saw that Nat had observed it. The boy's eye, quick and steady by nature, embraced without conscious effort every smallest detail of the place and people; Darnell had not been far wrong in his estimate of Nathan's rather Indian gifts. He stood before the cook and housemaid, unembarrassed, in a boy's cool detachment from the world of women and their incomprehensible ways. The girl who had opened the door jumped up and ran into the farther house upon his errand; and after a moment the cook remarked affably: —

"Ye're from the counthry?"

"Yes," said Nat.

"Ye've niver been in town befure, I dinnaw?"

"Once."

"It's yersilf that can shoot wid that gun, now, ain't it?" she said ingratiatingly.

"Yes."

She set about her work, with an expression of baffled and a little puzzled amusement. It was a rout, something similar to that of the British charge at Fort Stephenson. Yet Nat had no desire to show himself either surly or uncommunicative; it never occurred to him to expand his answers to her questions, or to ask any in his turn. He waited patiently; and, an entry-door swinging ajar, he heard voices in the ad-

jacent room. There was a child's voice, a man's heavier grumble, and one not loud nor high, but of an extraordinary carrying quality, a peculiar distinctness in its unsubdued, yet sweet, vibrations.

"It's the new boy about the place, William. *William*, why don't you answer? It's the new boy — I saw him go past the window — he had a *gun* — a *gun* of all things! No, Georgie, you can't go and see him — no — you can see the gun some other time — Georgie, I said *no!* He looked dirty — isn't he dirty, Norah? You don't know? Well, mercy, I don't suppose you do know; they don't seem to know the difference between being clean and dirty in Ireland, anyhow. I don't want you to go near him, Georgie — you don't *want* to touch a dirty boy like that, do you? What's that, William? Oh, pshaw, he can't hear me — and besides he *is* dirty, Will — I just caught a glimpse of him and I know he's dirty — all those country people that come in the store are. I don't want the children to go near him — maybe there're things in his hair — he seemed to have very thick hair, and I don't believe it's ever been washed —"

The cook closed the door hastily, with a quick conscious glance at Nathan. It opened, however, almost immediately, with a species of delicate bustle, a light, gracious hurly-burly which Nathan grew in time to recognize as the invariable accompaniment of all Mrs. Ducey's actions. She stood on the threshold, and the boy eyed her with an unmoved countenance as he has since been told, but in reality stirred to his depths by a wondering, delighted, even reverent admiration. He understood at a stroke all Nance's rhapsody; he had not dreamed there could exist on this dull earth a loveliness so splendid and compelling, although he could not then — nor now — set down in terms its changeful and evasive brightness. He did not know whether Mrs. Ducey's features were regular or no, her eyes gray or hazel — it did not matter. She seemed taller than most women; her movements of an incomparable grace, buoyancy, and vigor springing from abounding good health, good spirits, good nature. She dominated the little company; clothes and setting surrendered to her; the fresh morning-gown she wore was, I dare say, only a cotton print, but it flowed about her in folds of an antique nobility; her clear eyes, her brilliant hair, the very glow in

her cheeks irradiated the kitchen, and she looked upon us from her heights like a star.

"Is that the boy — are you the boy? Oh, mercy, that gun's dangerous — didn't you know any better than to bring a gun? You can't go hunting here, you know, there's nothing to hunt — take that gun away — take it outdoors —"

"It ain't loaded, ma'am," said Nathan, while the two handmaids looked on with covert grins. "It can't hurt anybody."

"Hm!" Mrs. Ducey gave an indescribable little musical grunt, and went on as if he had not spoken. "Take that gun away — it's dangerous — I won't have any guns around the house —" she raised her sweet voice in an accent of uncontrolled terror. "Come away from that gun, Georgie — don't go near it — come away — it might go off and kill you —"

"Aw, he said it wasn't loaded, ma; it can't hurt me," said Georgie, fingering the bright barrel of the weapon curiously. He was a sallow and plainly dyspeptic youngster of twelve or so, with a large head and very large, soft, dark eyes, in which there was an expression of appealing feebleness, reminding Nathan vaguely of certain baby animals.

"Georgie, did you hear mother? Let the gun alone —"

"Aw, Ma —"

"Drop the gun, sonny!" said Nathan.

The boy dropped it promptly at this command, though he had wholly disregarded his mother's. He edged over to her side, hunching his shoulders peevishly, yet with a look of fright, oddly out of proportion to the rebuke he had received — if rebuke it could be called, for Nat had spoken gently. "You've got awfully funny eyes — kind of bright and shiny like our carving-knife," he commented with agreeable freedom.

"Georgie, hush, you mustn't say things like that about people's looks, no matter how queer they are — and besides the boy has very nice eyes — I'm sure he has very nice eyes indeed, hasn't he, William?" said Mrs. Ducey, with an intention so evidently and eagerly kind that Nathan, if he felt some surprise at this candid appraisement, still could not resent it. And, being in no sense a judge of manners or the world, he accepted this frankly with the rest of his experi-

ences. "George, come here to mother — remember what I told you —" said Mrs. Ducey, anxiously. She made soundlessly with her lips the outlines of the words "don't touch him" and supplemented the pantomime by gathering her crisp skirts aside in illustration. George retreated obediently. None of this escaped Nathan; he had never heard of lepers at the time, or he might have felt like one; but he made no such comparison, merely holding his ground, with the color rising a little in his sun-browned face. And Mr. Ducey following up his wife at that moment, the youth was too occupied with the first view of his future employer to spare much attention elsewhere. He thought that Georgie looked rather like his father, who was a man perhaps about thirty-five years old, dark, tall, and slender, with the same appearance of physical weakness, and the same big, sentimental eyes — sentimental not being at this time, however, a word in active use in Nat's vocabulary; he would have put Mr. Ducey down as being slightly *sawney*. He stood up straight, and answered the other's questions with an instinctive conciseness. He may have been a little self-conscious, knowing that his measure was being taken, and very eager to "suit." Yet if the Duceys, husband and wife, if little George yonder, if the Irishwomen ostentatiously slopping about with their mops and dishpans and sending him a furtive look from time to time, if these were all taking his measure, so was Nathan taking theirs — and I have sometimes thought that there is no tribunal so stern, so exacting and pitiless, as that of youth. At fifteen we are as hard as flint, at fifty little better than a miserable bog of compromises — so does the whirligig of time bring in its revenges! I do not say that Mr. Nat displayed such preternatural acuteness as to gauge his new employers upon a moment's acquaintance with ruthless accuracy; he was no marvel of precocity. In fact, he was not conscious of seeking to understand and weigh them at all. I cannot so much as tell when that inevitable process began; but even the trivial details of this first meeting must have counted for something in it, and the earliest impression never quite wore away.

"He seems to be a willing boy — but the *worst* looking," said Mrs. Ducey in the entry, as the master and mistress of the house concluded this momentous interview; "I don't

know how we can have him drive the carriage. You'll have to give him some of your clothes, William; I mean the old ones that you're going to throw away — they'll be plenty good enough for him. There's that suit I was going to give to that old blind beggar that comes around — they'll do nicely for — what's his name? Nathan. He may look a little better after he's cleaned up — Oh, fiddle-de-dee, he can't hear me; you're all the time s-h-h-ing me, Will. I believe you don't *like* me to talk at all. What? When you mumble so low that way, I can't understand what you're saying. Hurt *what?* Hurt the boy's feelings? William, I think it's very unkind of you to say that — yes, I *do* — it's unkind. You know I *never* would hurt anybody's feelings. Oh, now, you needn't come around me that way —" the rest died off somewhere in the interior of the house. And, in a few minutes, little George came running back to the kitchen.

"Ma says I'm to take you out to the stable, and show you where you're to sleep," he informed Nathan with a good deal of importance. "I'm going to carry your gun. I know all about guns — I can shoot first-rate, I —"

"Did your ma say you could?" Nat asked him. The boy looked him straight in the eye as he answered: "Yes — of course. She said for me to carry the gun — she said —"

Nathan folded his arms, and surveyed the other from his lank, slab-sided height, judicially. There was a momentary silence in the kitchen; Bridget and Nora suspended their rolling-pin and knife-board activities to watch and listen with an unusual interest.

"I don't guess she said anything like that, Georgie," said Nat, picking up the musket himself and moving towards the door; "I kinder guess she said you weren't to go near it, ain't that so?" he suggested pleasantly.

"Aw, she did too say I could carry it —"

The cook and housemaid burst into strident laughter. "That's the toime ye got come up with, Jarge," said the former, wiping her eyes on her apron. Nathan did not laugh himself, he only grinned a little as he followed his young guide out-of-doors. The latter did not appear at all crestfallen or shamefaced at the late exposure; his soft, pathetic eyes had not even wavered.

"They haven't got any sense," he observed cheerfully to

Nathan, with a backward shrug towards the kitchen; "and Ma don't know anything, either. Say, lemme carry it, will you? It's yours, ain't it? Say, lemme carry it." He laid his small hands on the heavy rosewood stock of the weapon and sought to wrest it from its owner.

"You'd better mind yer mother fer oncet, seems to me," said Nathan. "You don't want to worry her, do ye? That ain't no man's way to do. S'posin' she *is* kinder pernickety 'bout th' gun? That's th' way wimmen is, I guess; they can't help it. Ye don't want to worry 'em; 'tain't fair. You're a man, y'know." He shifted the gun to his shoulder out of the boy's reach, struck — and rather disagreeably — by his persistence.

"Aw, she don't know anything. It ain't loaded, and she's scared just the same; she's just silly 'nough to be 'fraid of its hurting me. Lemme carry it, will you?"

Nat went on silently, the boy dogging him with a kind of feeble determination, not wholly childish; curiously feminine, in fact. "Ma'd never know it, anyhow — she'll never find out!"

"Everything gits found out first er last, I reckon," said Nathan, announcing, without knowing it, one of the greatest and most stable truths of life; he was simply casting about for some argument that would impress this unruly youngster. George Ducey lacked only three years or so of Nat's own age, but he seemed to the latter unconscionably babyish. Perhaps the hard circumstances of backwoods life caused children to mature earlier, but this boy, Nathan thought, was helpless and backward in comparison with little Joe Williams, for instance. You could have trusted Joe, who was an honest, sturdy, not too bright little fellow, almost anywhere, with anything; he was no bad substitute for a man, with his round freckled face, his brave blue eyes, his ragged pantaloons — Nathan thought of him with a sudden warming of the heart. But this small, frail, finicking creature, everlastingly babbling —! For George *was* everlastingly babbling. When he had finally yielded the point about the gun — which Nat sagaciously hung up on a pair of hooks well above his young friend's head, over the bed in the little stable-loft room which was to be his — George, following him about, poured out a stream, a fountain, a flood of talk, mostly concerning himself

in whom he was, as is not infrequently the case, very ingenuously interested. He would be thirteen his next birthday, that would be in the fall, in November, the eleventh of November. Everybody always gave him presents on his birthday, *everybody*, the hired girls and all; his mother didn't like it if they didn't give him presents; why, once she sent off the hired man because he didn't give George a present. His birthday was the *eleventh* of November — not the tenth nor the twelfth, but the *eleventh*. He guessed Uncle George — his Uncle George Marsh that he was named after — he guessed Uncle George would give him a gold watch. Uncle George was ever so rich; he was the richest man in this town, the richest man in the United States. When Georgie grew up, he was going to be rich, too; he was going to be the richest man in the world; he was going to marry a beautiful princess; Ma said he was as handsome as a little prince: did Nathan ever see a prince? The princes in fairy tales always could do everything — he could, too. There wasn't hardly anything he couldn't do. He had the best marks of anybody in school; they didn't like it, the other boys didn't, they were jealous; he had to lick 'em; he could lick any boy in school; he *had* licked 'em, the whole school —

"My! You'll git me kinder skeered of ye, if ye go on like that," said Nat, soberly; "stand off a little further, ye might git one of these here chips in yer eye — they fly considerable when I'm choppin'."

"I wouldn't hurt *you*," said George, with condescension.

"Thanky kindly," said Nathan, governing his smile; he might have spared the trouble, for George was as impervious to satire as he was to reproof. And I may set it down here for a contribution to the sum of human experience, that although I have met in my time many mighty performers with the ancient English weapon, I never met one who had the slightest sense of humor.

"They're all jealous of me, you know," George repeated in explanation. "I'm always head. Ma says she never saw anything like the way I do my sums — she says I've got a natural head for figures. I can add just like — just like — just as *quick*. I never make mistakes, not even the hardest sums that the rest of 'em can't do at all."

"That so? What's eighteen-thirty-five, 'n' eighteen

thirty-six, 'n' eighteen-thirty-seven all put together, hey?" Nat inquired in the benevolent design of experimenting on this wondrous balloon — finding out if it were a possible thing to prick and abase it. He paused to stand erect and wipe his forehead on the sleeve of his shirt, and in the act caught sight of a little girl with some books in a strap coming around the corner of the house.

"Eighteen-thirty-five and eighteen-thirty-six," said George, elaborately, "why — why — that makes — it makes —"

"Blue lightning on the add, ain't ye?" said Nat, returning to his task; and, fortunately for George's reputation — although, if I am not mistaken, it would have taken more than this to cast him down — the conversation was here interrupted by the arrival of the little girl. She came hesitatingly toward them along the walk which hereabouts was arched over with a trellis whereon a grape-vine grew and twined; the sun winked overhead amongst swift, incessant April clouds, and a fantastic pattern of shadow from the woodwork netted with the yet leafless vine played over her as she moved. It was the fashion to dress little girls in those days exactly to resemble their mothers and grown-up sisters, in a solemn propriety of wide skirts and coal-scuttle headgear; extraordinarily meek-appearing white embroidered pantalettes, white stockings, and ankle-gaiters decorated the lower parts of them; they wore the most amazing little mantles with fringes and bugles, like so many small grandmothers. This child differed from her elders only by a braid of brown hair almost as thick as Nathan's wrist, trailing down her back; she was a grave, inquiring, and rather homely young person. "Hello!" said George, "you back? Is school out? Did you miss any times? How many times did you miss?"

"I didn't miss any," said the other, coming a little nearer and surveying Nathan with shy curiosity.

"Huh — don't believe it," said George, gallantly; "you always miss." Nathan silently set the blade of the axe deep in a knotted stick, and split the wood in halves.

"My, you're strong, ain't you?" said the little girl, coming nearer him. "I like strong people," she added after a moment, in an explanatory tone. "What's your name?"

"His name's Nathan," interposed George, in a manner so closely duplicating Mrs. Ducey's that the effect was startling;

it some way conveyed the impression of entire personal disregard, as if the speaker were alluding to a post, a pet animal, some characterless and scarcely sentient creature. "Ma says you're not to touch him — he's dirty."

"You better stand out'n th' way, er I might nip ye with th' axe," said Nathan, more gruffly than was natural to him. And at once — being a kindly lad — felt a twinge of self-reproach to see the little girl sheer off from his neighborhood, obedient and rather frightened. "I wouldn't want to hurt ye, y'know," he said gently.

"She's afraid — she's a 'fraidy-cat," said George, with contempt; "I ain't afraid. I ain't afraid of anything — I'm just as brave! I wouldn't be afraid of — of a whole lot of soldiers with guns. I'd go right up to 'em — I *would*, if there was an army. What would you do? I bet you'd run away!"

"I bet I would too," said Nathan, chopping steadily.

"I wouldn't — I'd fight 'em all."

"You *couldn't* fight an army, George — could he fight a whole army?" said the little girl, reasonably appealing to Nathan.

"Dunno," said Nat. "Mightn't be brave to run away, but 'twould be better sense. Kinder puts me in mind of what a old Injun oncet said to a man I know. '*Hungh!*' he says, 'white man heap fool. Live jay better 'n a dead eagle!'"

She looked at him measuringly. "That's the longest you've said yet," she remarked; "I guess you don't care much about talking, do you? Now you're laughing," she added quickly, her own grave little face breaking into dimples. "With your eyes, kind of, I mean. My name's Frances Blake — you can call me Francie, if you — if you'd like to. I'm eight. How old are you?"

Nat told her, warming, not unnaturally, I think, to the first person, child as she was, who had displayed a living interest in him. The little thing climbed up on a saw-buck, and sat swinging her books in their strap, swinging her bonnet by its strings, swinging her proper white legs, while she chattered. "I haven't got any father or mother, either," she said eagerly, when Nat had answered some of her other questions; "they're dead — a great long while ago when I was a

little weenty teenty baby; that's why I'm not sorry. Aunt Anne says I ought to be sorry, but I just ain't. I just live here, you know, there isn't any other place for me — I'm Aunt Anne's little girl, she says. I've got to go to school and study hard, Aunt Anne says, because I'm not very quick — she says I'm the slowest child she ever saw."

"I don't have to go to school — I get excused *often* — often and *often*. Ma got me excused to-day, because I'm sick. I've got the awfullest sore throat you ever saw," said George, hopping on one foot; "I ain't a bit rugged, Ma says. I'm delicate."

"I thought you looked kinder peakèd," said Nathan. Frances gave him a sharp glance.

"Now you're laughing again," she said, nodding her head shrewdly. "Oh, looky here, I've got your name in one of my books! It's an old one I'm not using, except to learn to make writing-letters out of. Look, it says: 'Can Nat pat the cat?' You said you were Nat, didn't you?"

Nathan arrested the axe to stare at the page she spread before him, with the first prick of interest he had so far experienced in his life, in a book. His unskilled eyes and mind followed the lines of print without intelligence until they encountered with a pleasurable surprise his own name in clear letters such as Vaughn's Vegetable Lithontriptic Mixture itself could not have bettered.

"There, N, A, T, that's the big print letters, and here it's the little ones all except the big N, and down here it's in the writing-lesson — that you do on your slate, you know, when Miss Thompson reads it off," Francie went on, delighted with this phenomenon. "I b'lieve there's more about you in the book, but a boy tore out some of the leaves to make spit-balls of — and I upset ink over that page, so it's not all here. Didn't you have this book at your school? I can write that, 'Can Nat pat —'"

"Huh! I should think so," said George, scornfully; "you ought to — going on nine!"

"I know — I'm slow — and then I didn't begin until last fall," said the child. She wrinkled her pale little forehead and eyebrows — which latter were very thick, black, and straight and lent what was plainly an entirely misleading expression of resolution and temper to her face — with a

passing look of worry; then it cleared. "But I always learn everything after a while," she finished philosophically, "so it doesn't matter. I'm through with that book now. Would you like to have it?" For Nathan had taken the shabby primer from her hand and was turning its stained and ragged leaves with a sudden strong curiosity.

"Why, I — I wouldn't want — I don't like —" he stammered. "Are ye sure ye want to give it away? You don't know me very well fer to make me presents," he warned her with a half-laugh. "They hed books like this where I went ter school, but they wan't enough of 'em to go 'round quite — ye hed to larn 'em, two out'n one book, ye know — I never took much stock in 'em somehow. But this is a real nice book. I guess it's too good ter give away, ain't it?"

"It isn't any present," Francie said; "it's just my old book, — I wouldn't call that a present. Only having your name in it that way, wouldn't you like it?"

"Well, I would *so*, and thanky kindly," said Nathan, with warmth, seeing his acceptance would please her. He deposited the book carefully on an upper beam of the woodshed. "It's a kinder little book fer folks to begin on, ain't it? I kin read it nights er times when I ain't workin'."

Friendly relations being thus established, Francie climbed back on her saw-buck — which she had temporarily deserted to complete the transfer of the speller — and sat hunched up watching him, with her feet knotted around one of its legs, and her chin propped on her hands.

"Did you like your school much? I don't like school," she remarked candidly. "What was her name? The one that taught you, I mean?"

"'Twan't no *her*, 'twas a *him*," said Nat, swinging the axe rhythmically; "leastways 'twas a he and a she off an' on, you know — sometimes one, sometimes t'other, fer three-four weeks at a time. They don't hev' school stiddy right along where I come from, only jest when folks kin spare time to go."

"My!"

"I didn't always go, even when school took up, either," Nat said explanatorily; "I useter go out an' shoot 'n' catch fish —"

"Oh, my! Where — where did you go?"

"Why, all over — in th' woods, an' everywheres."

"Were there wild-flowers there? My, I wish I lived in the country!" said Francie, longingly.

"No, ye don't," said Nat, in haste, aghast at the thought of leading the young astray. "'Tain't — 'tain't a nice place fer little girls like you. And I hadn't orter been shootin' an' fishin' with old Jake neither — I'd orter been in school, I guess," he added half to himself, a little regretfully.

"There's the dinner-bell," said George, and started towards the house. He had not attended closely to the recent proceedings, his interest in Nathan as a novelty seeming to be already on the wane. And it was with the greater surprise, therefore, that the latter saw him pause on a sudden, face about, and presently come sauntering slowly back again, fidgeting a little, with his hands in his pockets.

"Say," he began in a confidential undertone, "you got any money?"

Francie looked from one to the other of them anxiously.

"Me?" said Nat, who had exactly two dollars and forty cents; "yes."

"Gimme two bits, will you? I'll give it back to you tomorrow. I know a way I can make an awful lot of money — if I just had the two bits to start on. I got to get a few things first, you know — twine and — and things. It's a secret, or I'd tell you. I guess I'll make ten or 'leven dollars, *sure*. Mebbe more."

"What do you want of *his* two bits, then? Why don't you get Uncle George —" Francie demanded practically.

The boy turned on her peevishly. "You needn't worry, Miss Smarty; I'm not saying anything to *you*. She made a quarter herself digging dandelion-greens out of the front-yard. Father gave it to her for digging 'em; and she never gave me a cent of it," he said morosely. "Meany — all girls are mean, I guess. Ma says we should always share everything."

"You didn't help any — Uncle William said I'd earned it all by myself," said Frances.

"I'll pay you right away to-morrow," George repeated, turning to Nathan again; "you see, I got to have it to-day, on account of the other boys all being out of school to-morror, 'cause it's Saturday and I ain't going to divide with 'em, you know. They all know about this; but they can't do

anything right now, and I'm sick, so I don't have to go to school to-day."

"How'll those other fellers like that, though?" asked Nathan, fishing out the money in no little amusement.

"Ho! They ain't a bit smart, anyhow. I'll fix it so they'll never know about me getting — I mean going — well, I can't tell you, you know, 'cause that'd let the secret out. I'll pay you to-morrow — if I forget, just remind me, will you?" He went off whistling to the house, with the quarter secured in his pocket; the little girl also began slowly to retreat. "I — I guess you don't know about George," she remarked diffidently, digging one toe into the ground and spinning halfway around on it and halfway back. "*You* can have my quarter if you like."

"Lordy, I don't want yer money," exclaimed Nathan. "If you don't look out, you'll give away everything you've got."

"It's not that, but George, you know — he — he won't ever pay you back the two bits. He always says to-morrow — and then he don't pay it back at all. And Aunt Anne says it's awful to owe the people that work for you anything. But George don't — he don't — I mean it's no use to tell him, because he's always going to pay you to-morrow — and he just gets mad, if you say anything. I — I wish you'd take my quarter." She faced him with eyes full of her childish trouble, and Nathan divined that the situation was not unusual.

"Why don't you tell your aunt, then — ?" he was beginning, when she interrupted him with a surprised look.

"George would tell her it wasn't so," she said simply. "And then it wouldn't make any difference what I said, she'd just say, 'H'm," and wouldn't hear me any more. I wish you'd take my quarter, please. Nora cried about her money — but it was more, it was a dollar — she ain't going to stay here — Aunt Anne says she ain't kind to children."

Nat sat down on the saw-buck, considering her thoughtfully; and she came and stood in front of him, eying him back with a grave and open gaze.

"You'd better take my quarter," she repeated, nodding her wise head.

"You've got no call to pay George's debts," said Nathan; "what do you want to do that for?"

"Why, *somebody's* got to pay them, don't you see? It's not right to owe people, Aunt Anne says. And *he* won't pay — and you went and loaned him the money before I could stop you — and I'm his cousin — *somebody's* got to pay you, or you won't ever get it," argued the child, still clinging, spite of the evident confusion of her mind, to some rock of principle bedded in the very nature of her; and a spirit within Nat himself, equally native and inarticulate, understood and answered her.

"You think George beat me out'n my money 'cuz I didn't know him, and somebody had orter told me — is that it?" he said. "Don't you worry, Francie, I know all about George. I reckon he borrys your money, too, when he gits th' chanst, hey?"

She hesitated, then nodded. "I just *give* it to him, you know," she explained.

"Might as well give it first as last, hey?" said Nathan, grinning; "he'll git your two bits direckly if he keeps at ye long enough — an' he's a master-hand to keep at ye," he commented; and seeing assent in her face, went on: "Tell ye what: you bring yer money here an' give it to me, — wait a minute, I ain't through yet, — an' I'll put it in this here little tin box along with th' flint an' steel an' th' piece of punk I keep to light th' lantern with, right up here on th' shelf by th' lantern. Then next time George wants to borry yer money, ye kin jest send him to me — I'll larn him a few 'bout borryin' from girls!" he wound up, not without relish.

"I wanted to pay you, though," said the youngster, troubled.

"Well, ye're trustin' me with yer money, ain't ye? That's pretty nigh th' same thing." He persuaded her to this agreement finally, and Frances brought him the coin in a shiny little pasteboard box with a bit of jewellers' cotton, bright pink, enfolding it. Nathan has it still.

CHAPTER IV

The Mail-Bag

Mrs. William Ducey to
Mrs. Cornelia Marsh at
Chenonville, Avoyelles Parish, La. Sunday (no date)

My Precious Mother,

Your letter came Thursday. It is still chilly and I think you had better not come North until the middle of June but of course if you start now and visit everybody on the way up you will not get here before the warm weather. I do wish you could bring Mam Jinnie or one or two of the other old darkies and that smart young Luella that you say is such a good semptress with you (only I generally don't care for the yellow ones they are too near white and inclined to put on airs) but Uncle George and William both say you can't bring slaves into this State without danger of some kind of fuss so better not try it. I think it's the silliest thing I ever heard of you can bring everything else you own all the furniture and everything and nobody would say a word and nobody in the South ever cares what you take *there*. And if they are *yours* why what business is that of anybody else's what you bring? *I* never would think of interfering in other peoples' affairs but William says women don't understand and I must not worry about it. I just said to him Why William I can't *help* worrying and I should think you would see what a trouble I have with servants. And if we can't bring slaves from the South why do they let Governor Gywnne import a whole family from Ireland and set them down in his kitchen I'd like to know. It's just the same thing exactly. And Will just laughed and said No it isn't Puss, and Governor Gwynne *paid* his servants. But of course you know that's not the real reason, it's because they're white (the Irish I mean) and nobody up here ever makes any to-do over the white people tho'

the servants half the time aren't nearly as well treated as our colored ones. But they won't believe *that* they think we're standing around with raw-hides and blood-hounds every minute making the slaves behave. And they just smile and shake their heads (that is some of them do) when I say that we're *fond* of our negroes and nobody ever treats them badly but the overseers and they're almost always men from the North. If you brought Luella you know you could hire her out part of the time when you hadn't any sewing for her to do or didn't need her and that way you could easily get back the money it would take to bring her. The same way you know that Cousin Elise Guion did with her Polly and Ned after Cousin Louis got shot in Baton Rouge the time they elected Judge Lestrappe and she was a widow and didn't have anything left to live on. I must say I always thought she did pretty well after Cousin Louis died better than when he was alive. Well anyway it's no use talking you can't bring them.

The way things are here it's a perfect nuisance (about servants I mean) and I never shall get used to it if I live in the North for *centuries*. I can't understand now why it was that none of us ever noticed it when we used to come up here with you every summer and visit Uncle George before any of us were married. But girls aren't thinking of anything but dress and having a good time and then of course we were in the best hotels and boarding-houses wherever we went and never heard a thing about servants. And by the way Uncle George has made a change and is boarding now with a Mrs. Woolley on Friend Street. I wanted him to come here and live with us but he doesn't care about it and you know he's very *set* so I suppose it's just as well. I was going to tell you when I got started on this that I got two of the girls out of Governor Gwynne's Irish family there were a whole piling lot of them all ages going down in steps one a little bit younger than the next you know which I suppose is the reason the governor brought them so there'd always be somebody coming on to take the place as fast as they got married or anything. It's a splendid plan if you can only get hold of a big enough family. These two he didn't want of course. Marian Gwynne is keeping house for him now (you know Marian Ellison the one that married David Gwynne)

She came back last fall from Philadelphia after David died she's got one child Louise the reddest head you ever saw Gwynne all over. So of course Marian took her pick of the Irish and got the best of them tho' dear knows that's not saying much. My two didn't know a *living thing* and went whooping and *keening* around in that Irish way till I couldn't *stand* it and they're both going when this month is up. They want to go around the house in their bare feet and break the china half a dozen plates *at a clip* as Will says so that I have to let them go in sheer self-defence or I wouldn't have a thing left to put on the table. William seemed to think it rather funny until Bridget scrubbed his leather arm-chair with soft-soap and boiling water I'm sure I don't know why for she *never* scrubs the kitchen-floor and then he sang a very different tune. Of course I want to teach them our ways about cooking I always do that as none of them ever know anything about corn-bread or beat-biscuit or gumbo but there are some things I supposed *everybody* knew and thought I didn't need to tell them. But I never saw people so stupid they *can't* learn tho' I've tried my best for weeks and put up with all kinds of impertinence from them and I just had to tell them I couldn't do anything with them they were too dull and I'd give up and let somebody else try. Neither one of them seemed a bit sorry although they are leaving a good home and I think we are giving the highest wages of anybody in town a dollar seventy-five to the cook and a dollar and a half to Nora. I asked Nathan if he didn't know a nice country-girl that wanted a place in town and if he wouldn't tell her about us and what a good place this was. But he said he didn't know of any one. He's another slow one the slowest mortal on earth I do believe not about his work you know but other things. But he seems to be improving here lately.

I forget whether I told you that Nathan is our new chore-boy. William was perfectly possessed to get one from the country he says they're always the best and he heard about this one from a farmer that comes in to do his trading at the store. Well he was the wildest-looking scarecrow you can possibly imagine I tell you my heart went down into my boots when I saw him but as I say he's getting along very well in spite of his looks and you never have to tell him a

thing but *once* which is a comfort. I thought at first it would be as well to watch him and see that he didn't take things or neglect or mistreat anything for I never saw one of them that wouldn't bear watching. And you know our harness is very handsome with silver-plated buckles on it. So I have been going out every now and then when he wasn't expecting anybody and kind of wandering round keeping one eye out and asking about things in a way that showed I *knew*. But I never caught him doing anything out of the way and nothing's been missed so far. Probably he don't know enough to know when things are valuable. He seems to work right straight ahead without paying any attention to anybody even *me* and William says the work is done all right but a man never *knows*. Nathan is rather silent and sulky and never speaks except when he is spoken to so different from our colored people who always have such beautiful manners. I told William thinking he'd be pleased for he never has any time to look after anything or see that the servants are doing their work and I want to spare him that extra trouble as much as I can. But he was quite put out and said I ought to remember that Nathan was a self-respecting white man and that he wouldn't go picking and stealing and idling away his time like the darkies and he thought it very strange that after living in the North five years I couldn't see that white people of the working class were different from slaves and that he thought maybe that was one reason why I had such a time getting along with them. I never knew Will so unreasonable and I'm afraid maybe he's not very well or has been having trouble at the store and you know he's too sweet and dear ever to tell me anything about his business for fear of worrying me tho' I should really like to know and I'm sure I could help him.

I didn't argue with him at all I just said Why William you know the negroes don't call it *stealing* to take things to *eat* once in a while or pretty things to wear you just have to watch them a little and when they take things just take them away and tell them they can't have that and they won't make a bit of fuss. It wouldn't be at all odd if Nathan should take something and I wouldn't have any squabble with him I'd just tell him nicely and quietly that that wasn't

right and the experience would be good for him. They all have to be taught things like that. I've hardly ever had a servant I didn't have to teach that way, and I'm sure I've had a good many. But while I was talking Will just got up and said he had to go to the store and went off without another word so I *know* he's worried about something and it makes me very anxious and miserable.

This long letter is all about nothing but servants but you know, mother darling I never could *compose* I just have to write right along what comes into my head and after all I generally manage to get everything in that's *news*. George is doing *wonderfully* at school especially when you consider he has to be out of it a great deal of the time when he isn't well. Of course he's *my child* and I don't want to be silly about him like so many mothers but it's a great pleasure to me to have him so handsome and smart. I wish I could say as much for Francie but there is no use pretending the child is altogether her father over again and not in the least like dear Sister who was always so gentle and refined. Here latterly she's struck up a great friendship with the hired man and wants to go and stand around and watch him and talk to him at his work. She must get more out of him than the rest of us for we never hear him say anything but yes ma'am and no ma'am. But Francie certainly has a bent for that sort of society and it almost reconciles me to Sister's death when I think how it would have grieved her.

I will write you again at Cousin Tom's and you must write me every place you stop and how long you think you will be there so that I will know where to send my letters. With a heartful of love for my own dearest mother as ever your

NANCY.

P.S. William has just brought me the most *beautiful* brooch a heart-shaped opal with diamonds all around it. I know he feels badly for having spoken to me so harshly about the hired man — as if that mattered. Oh mother dear I just *can't wait* till you get here I am so crazy for you to see it. Lovingly A.

Mrs. William Ducey to
Mrs. Cornelia Marsh
care Judge Thomas B. Henry
Memphis Tenn., June 17th, 183–

MY DEAREST MOTHER.

Well it is sizzling hot here now so you wouldn't be much better off than where you are still I was very much dissappointed (*sic*) when your letter came saying you couldn't get here at the time we set. But of course if all Helen's children are down with the measles you can't leave her it would be perfectly heartless when she depends on you so. Measles aren't dangerous but to have three or four of the poor little things (and hers are so near together barely a year between them) all crying and miserable at once is pretty hard to stand without some other help than the colored servants. Grace and her two boys are here now and Tulie Vanneaudet; they all send their love to you.

What you said about meeting the only man that escaped from the Alamo on the boat coming up from New Orleans was most interesting but oh mother I'm afraid you've been terribly taken in. Do let me tell you what happened here the other day. I was sitting upstairs sewing on Francie's little dress for the pic-nic Mrs. Hunter is going to give her Jennie and the children on the twenty-fifth when school closes when Georgie came bursting into the room with his eyes as big as saucers screaming out Oh Ma there's a soldier in the kitchen do come and look at him, he's the last one that got out! He was so excited I couldn't make out what he was talking about so I thought I might as well go down and see the last one that got out whoever and whatever he was and wherever he got out of. When I got to the kitchen here was Mary (she's the new one) setting a great table-full of cold beef and pie and pickles and everything in the pantry for the man who looked awfully weak and tired poor fellow and no wonder for he told me he had walked every foot of the way from Texas here and he was going up to his old mother who lived in New York State and he expected to die there if not before he'd had such a terrible time. And he wasn't the *last* one as my little boy said but the *only* one that got out of the Alamo alive. It was the most pitiful thing I

ever saw he was almost starved altho' before he would eat a bite he asked couldn't he have a little stimulant as he felt very faint and it was dangerous for a starving man to eat a meal unless he had something like that beforehand. So Mary was going to give him some cider but I said Mary how can you! And I made her get him a bottle out of that case of French brandy Uncle George gave William last Christmas and you may know how badly he felt by this taking at least two-thirds of it before he felt strong enough to begin and eat. He was *so* grateful and said Madam you know what's good for a starving man and drank off a whole tumbler with a little water at one swallow. You see he was very different from the man you met except that he hadn't any money either. He was all in rags and I got him some clothes and a good shirt of William's and it was perfectly touching to hear him say Madame I'm nothing but a poor defender of my country I can't give you anything in return for your kindness but God bless you. He was so overcome he could hardly speak distinctly. Just then Nathan the hired man came in, and he looked kind of queerly at the man but didn't say anything in his usual sulky way I suppose he was mad because he saw I had given the man some of Mr. Ducey's clothes which he considers his perquisite.

So then we got the man to tell us all about the fight at the Alamo and it wasn't *at all* as your man described it so you see you've been deceived and I'm so sorry you gave him any money. In the first place you know your man said Colonel Crockett drew a line and said for everybody to step over that wanted to go away and everybody but himself (your man I mean) stayed and he waited until the Mexicans stopped firing for a minute and dropped over the wall and swam the river and got away. But this man said it wasn't like that at all and the Mexicans never stopped firing for a second and Crockett never said that. He said it was the most aweful scene sometimes he thought he was going to lose his mind when he remembered it. Or dreamed about it. He killed six men himself and the last one with his dying effort hit him over the head with his rifle so he fell down insensible under the heap of the six he had killed and that way was hidden when the Mexicans came around killing the wounded afterwards. I said Mercy *six men* and he

said that wasn't anything Crockett killed fourteen he saw him and counted them as they fell and Col. Bowie shot eight and knifed five before they killed him. He said the Mexicans came swarming in by hundreds and our men were overwhelmed but kept on fighting like devils one man against a dozen at once so that they hardly knew what they were doing just shot and stabbed blindly right and left. Then Nathan drawled out My I don't see how you could take time to count them men you and the others killed. But of course he did that afterwards and he said he heard the Mexicans talking about it while he was lying on the ground. You see his story is almost *exactly* the same as they had in the newspapers so it must be true. He said it had taken him ever since over a year to get away from Texas and get this far North and he didn't know whether he'd live to see his mother after all and he was her only boy. And oh mother he cried when he said that and it was the saddest thing. I just thought of my little Georgie. I gave him two dollars so he could go part of the way on the stage or by the canal for I saw he must be very feeble from all he had gone through. And after I had come upstairs I heard a kind of rumpus in the kitchen and I looked out of the window and there was Nathan sort of boosting the man along to the side gate in a very rough way so I called out of the window to him and told him to be more gentle that poor man wasn't able to walk but he didn't answer just shoved him out of the yard and kept shoving him up the street altho' I could see the man was protesting. William brought Uncle George home to dinner and I told them about it and said plainly I didn't believe I wanted such a bad-tempered boy as Nathan around because it was such a bad example for Georgie and I was sure if he behaved like this at only sixteen or seventeen he would turn out a brutal vicious man. I thought they both looked rather funny and Will seemed a little taken aback about the brandy especially when he found there wasn't any left and said he thought cider would have done for the fellow, but I said Why *William* and then he kissed me and said I was a dear little woman and never mind he didn't care how much brandy I gave away. Then Uncle George said in his *swearing* way By — he'd like to see that chore-boy. And they both went out and talked to him and

came back laughing and Will told me he wouldn't dismiss him because he had really been doing what he thought was right and Uncle George seemed to think he was a pretty likely boy. William always is so attentive to Uncle George's likes and dislikes you know he thinks its his duty.

I have written this off in a great hurry to catch the mail as I want to be sure you will get it. Dearest love to all and keep the lion's share for yourself from

your own NANCY.

P.S. Will says the last six months the country has been fairly bristling with only survivors of the Alamo and they come into the store begging every two or three weeks. He says there're enough of them to have crammed the fort full and some left outside. Isn't it awful to think there are so many impostors? Your man must have been one of them.

NAN.

Mrs. William Ducey to
Mrs. Stevenson Desha, at
Frankfort, Ky. July (no other date)

MY DEAR SISTER BETTY,

Ma will be with you by the time this reaches Frankfort unless something has turned up to keep her at Emily's so this letter is for both of you. I have been expecting her from week to week and so have you I suppose but she is always a long while on the road for of course she can't go right by where people live and one's kin at that and never stop to see them you understand that as well as I do. Only it's a little awkward to have all our friends calling to see her for two months before she gets here and by the time she *does* get here they will all be completely *played out* and won't want to come again.

I wish you could come with her this time but of course if you're *expecting* in September it wouldn't be quite safe and besides you would be uncomfortable. I do hope it will be a boy this time. But you would be so interested to see this place again and meet everybody you used to know. It has changed so much in ten years and got so much bigger you would be perfectly astonished. Every one keeps talking about hard times and this *currency* trouble but it seems to

me things go right along just the same and they go on building houses and have lovely things in the stores. And I must say I can't see why people should make such a fuss over whether they buy things with a piece of silver marked ten cents or a piece of paper marked ten cents. They call them *shin-plasters* here I suppose they do with you too. Of course the paper ones aren't any good sometimes but generally you can get your ten cents worth with either one so what's the difference? And oh Betty I do think it's the funniest thing the way they all talk about General Jackson and the President (the Whigs talk I mean) and say it's all their fault about the shin-plasters and the banks breaking up you know and go on as if both the poor men had horns hoofs and tails and then lo and behold at the 4th of July banquet the other day didn't they get up and toast Jackson and Van Buren and talk about them as if they were the grandest things on earth! Every other day in the year they say the United States is going to the dogs and on the 4th it's the most prosperous wonderful country there is. Will says it's because they're all politicians and they have to do that way on a public occasion because it wouldn't be proper and dignified to say what they think. I tell you if the women ran it things would be different.

They had the banquet it was really just a basket-party you know like the burgoos at home out in Willson's Grove: I expect you remember the place because we went to a pic-nic there one summer when we were all up here visiting Uncle George only you were a right little girl at the time. It's generally kind of hot and flies in the lemonade and I don't care much about going but of course the children were crazy to. In the morning they had the procession as usual and we all saw it from the windows in the big room over William's store and then we went to the Methodist Church where the procession wound up not that they were all Methodists you know but its the biggest in town so everybody could get in and hear the exercises. The place was *jammed* to the doors and hotter Uncle George said than it was decent for any *church* to be. We had a struggle getting in tho' we were among the first and at last I got a seat and took Francie on my lap which didn't make either of us any cooler and Will had to stand and prop up Georgie who had

got himself somehow straddle of the pew-door. It was all decorated with flags and streamers and they had seats on the platform for the speakers and there they were and I did feel so sorry for them they looked so hot and uncomfortable and couldn't lounge or *let down* one single instant because everybody was looking square at them. Governor Vance sat in the middle and looked as if he was simply melting down (he's rather a stout man you know) and finally *did* unbutton his waistcoat I suppose he couldn't stand it any longer and no wonder it was stamped crimson velvet one of those double-breasted ones with two rows of cut crystal buttons you know very handsome and fashionable but *so* out of place particularly for a fleshy person. Then there was Bishop McIlvaine and he is a *dear* and Mr. Corwin and next to him Governor or I suppose I ought to say *ex*-governor Gwynne only it's so hard to remember and he was the only cool-looking one of them all. He's so lean you remember and immaculately dressed his shirt didn't wilt down one bit like every one else's but he seemed pretty cross for all that. I guess he can't help it I never saw him look pleasant. He's just like a scrawny old turkey-gobbler with that great hook nose and his hair has got awfully gray this last year I don't think you'd know him he seems so much older.

Well then Mr. Sharpless the Presbyterian minister got up and prayed and prayed and *prayed* until we were all nearly dead I suppose it's an aweful thing to say. But all the while he was praying I couldn't help thinking of what a time he had at home with Jimmie you'd think praying didn't do *him* much good anyhow. I'm sure you must recollect Jimmie he was such a darling little boy and you used to go and see Mary Sharpless and both of you girls have such a time dressing him up and playing with him. Mary's an old maid you know it's so strange she's had innumerable affairs but nothing ever seems to come to anything and I suppose she won't have any more chances now she's twenty-five at least she's a little bit older than you. And Jimmie has grown up a regular minister's son so wild they can't do anything with him. It must be a terrible cross to his poor father and mother and I believe Will and I hardly know how blessed we are to have a son like Georgie. They say Jim

dropped a handful of fish-worms down some other boy's back at Sunday-school and when the Methodists were having their Conference here and the whole town was full of them he got out in the yard and got some of the children in the neighborhood and the servants and delivered a long sermon with things like *powerfully converted* and *awful conviction of SIN* in a great roaring rumbling voice exactly to mimic the Reverend Bigelow (a great *pillar* among the Methodists) so that they were all in fits of laughter and everybody else perfectly scandalized. The worst of it is he's about fifteen or sixteen now too old to whip him with a cane and shut him up in the wood-shed the way his father used to do. Uncle George told Mr. Sharpless to his face that anyway he wouldn't give a —— for a boy that could be scared into good behavior with hell-fire or a strap either one. And poor Mr. Sharpless couldn't say a word for he'd come to ask for a donation!

Well I must get back to the 4th of July I knew you'd want to hear about Jimmie so I might as well tell you while I was thinking about it. After Mr. Sharpless got through we had the Star-Spangled Banner everybody standing up and singing and then they read the Declaration of Independence while we were still all standing of course. And by the way let me tell you while I'm talking about the Sharpless boy that as we were standing and I was a good deal bothered about Francie the child is so small yet I couldn't hold her up and I was really afraid she'd be smothered to death down there among all our skirts with a great fat woman squeezed up against me on the other side somebody leaned over from behind and whispered to me I'll take your little girl Mrs. Ducey and stuck out a great long arm and sort of scooped Francie up and stood her on the back of the pew. Afterwards when the reading was over I turned around to thank him and here it was Jim Sharpless and I suppose everybody in the place saw me speak to him and I was a good deal embarrassed. He is about as big for his age as Francie is little for hers with huge raw bony wrists sticking out of his sleeves but not so very bad-looking a boy for all his wildness. Of course I made Francie come to me right away but I spoke nicely to him and thanked him as if I had never heard that there was anything wrong with him at all. The next thing Governor Vance spoke on the day we celebrate

but he didn't say very much because I suppose he knew the others were going to speak right after him and they must have kind of divided up what there was to say so it would go around and nobody interfere with anybody else. And when he got through Governor Gwynne had his turn and spoke about the Soldiers of the Revolution and was quite interesting much more so than I thought he could be but Uncle George says he has always been a fine speaker and if you should come in in the middle of a speech Sam Gwynne was making you couldn't tell which side he was on and Uncle George says it takes a smart man to do that. And then Mr. Corwin spoke about the pioneers and first settlers and he just told funny stories and some that weren't *very nice* but the men all laughed like everything even the Bishop sort of grinned. Then we sang America and Bishop McIlvaine made a prayer that is he just said the General Thanksgiving out of the Service you know Almighty God Father of all mercies and said the Benediction and that ended it.

This was the first 4th of July I have been to in four or five years what with sickness and being in mourning for some of Mr. Ducey's family or something preventing. And speaking of mourning there weren't very many of Governor Gwynne's connection there only some of the men as a good many of them are wearing black for poor David. You know the Gwynnes are a great family to stand by one another and stick together. David was Charlotte's elder brother that you used to be such a friend of you must have seen him around the house when you used to go there. However in the evening we all went out to the Governor's to see the fireworks on the lawn that he has every Fourth for poor people. The family always ask a few of their friends to come and sit on the porch *not* to mix in with the poor people you know but just to see the fireworks. The Governor always goes down and walks around and talks to the poor people and the children and Uncle George says it's nothing but one of Sam Gwynne's *popularity dodges*. So we went and the place was all lit up and looked splendid you know it's his beautiful new house with everything in it very elegant but we had a doleful time in spite of it. For here was poor Mrs. David Gwynne going around in her black clothes all over crape trying to seem cheerful and I just said to her in the hall

Oh Marian my dear I know this is terribly hard for you and *why* do you do it? Her eyes filled up but she just said I can't help it Nannie you know it's on account of Uncle Samuel's position we've *got* to entertain and see people but it's awful when I think of last year. She told me all about David's dying of the cholera it was very bad in Philadelphia and she thought Louise might go too and she was nearly distracted so she just bundled up and came home out West tho' she didn't know what she was going to do or where she was going to live after she got here. And she said the Governor came right to her as soon as he heard where she was and told her to come here and consider his house her home that his nephew's wife was just the same to him as his own kin he would think himself more than repaid if she would look after his own motherless children. So of course she feels it a duty to have everything just the way he likes and do everything he says but I imagine it's not always very easy with that great house to take care of and all the Governor's children and they say the boys are very hard to manage. I told her I knew just how she felt because that was just the kind of scare I got into when Sister Cornelia and her husband died within a week of each other of yellow fever in New Orleans and I just made William take us all away and bring us up North to Uncle George I was too frightened to stay there a minute longer I believe I'd have lost my mind. She said Oh is that Cornelia' s little girl I thought she was yours and who did Cornelia marry? So Betty I told her she married a Mr. Francis Blake and that was all. I didn't have the courage to tell Marian Gwynne of all people that he was nothing but a play-actor I just *couldn't* do it and besides I don't know whether it would be quite fair to Francie to let that get out and I do hope you have never mentioned it to a soul for you know things like that do travel around in the most wonderful way. I went right on talking quite quickly and telling her William had gone in business up here and we meant to live here always but she didn't seem very much interested poor thing.

You can see we had quite an exhausting day of it on the 4th. In the afternoon we went to Willson's Grove and heard all the toasts after the banquet. It was just the way they all are. They toasted the Press may it forever stick

up as a beacon or something like that you know and then everybody would cheer and go on like mad. And then the Common Schools may they ever encourage the youth of our land and all the rest of it. And Female Patriotism may it something or other. And Henry Clay and Benjamin Franklin (his memory of course) and the Fair Daughters of the West may they so-and-so. And they had one about Intemperance *Slavery* Licentiousness may they never do this that or the other. You know people up here are perfectly silly about slavery they talk as if it were the unpardonable sin. The children were worn out when we got home and so cross there was no living in the house with them I never was so glad a day was over in my life.

I have written a *volume* but I knew you would be interested to hear all about everybody and what we are doing. Give ever and ever so much love to Ma and everybody with a good kiss and hug for my dear little sister as ever

NANCY.

Mrs. William Ducey to
Mrs. Cornelia Marsh at
The Broadway Hotel Cincinnati Ohio

Thursday August 2nd.

MY DEAR MOTHER

I am scribbling this off in a hurry yours having just come as I want it to get to you before you make the arrangement you speak of and the West-bound mail leaves at a quarter past three. It's ever so much better to come as far as you can by the canal. That would be as far as Dayton anyhow and would save you that much of the trip on the stage which is *horrid* so hot and dusty and dirty and the *worst* roads worse I think towards the Cincinnati end than this way tho' neither anything to boast of. They have a service with very nice accommodations for passengers of course not like an elegant Mississippi river steamboat but *very nice* altho' so slow. You would be so much cleaner and cooler and more comfortable than the stage that I *know* you would not regret it. They say the table is very good I don't know as I've never been on one myself. If you come all the way by the stage you have to change at Dayton sometime in the middle of the night because the Douglas line of coaches ends and it's Finnell's from there here.

I am sending this by the Express-Mail so it will surely reach you. They just began running it last month the coaches dash into town and out again like the wind it's quite a sight but a great deal finer to look at than to ride in I'm sure. One of them came from Zanesville that's 54 miles in four hours the other day that gives you some idea of the speed they go at. You have to put *Express-Stage* on the outside of your letter you'll see it on this one and it costs three or four times as much but if one is in a hurry it's a wonderful relief to know that your letter is flying along as if the Seven-League-Boots were carrying it and you don't care how much you spend. The only trouble about your taking the canal-boat is that nobody can tell exactly when you will get here they take it *very easy* and don't make the least effort to be on time for the coaches. But there are always dozens of men and boys hanging around the Capitol tavern where they all stop for the fresh horses and if you *should* arrive and find nobody there you could send down word to the store or to the house everybody knows where we live by any of them and I will send Nathan down with the carriage right away you won't have to wait any time and if it happened I couldn't come myself you would know the horses anyhow and Nathan is a tall thin boy with a kind of high nose and blue eyes you will know him by the eyes. But I'll be sure to come for I feel as if I couldn't wait to see you.

Just now we are very comfortably fixed for servants but nobody knows how long it will last it's a perfect procession through my kitchen. The hired man has been doing very well and seems to be steady. We gave him a half-holiday on the Fourth so that he could see the celebration and then he disappeared and I made sure he had gone off to get drunk the way they all do but it seems he had walked out in the country to see the people he used to live with and he was at work the next day as sober as could be. However I am afraid he is learning the impudent ways of the rest of them because the other day I was out in the garden standing over him to see that he weeded it properly and I just thought I would give him a talking-to in a nice way you know about his manners never saying but yes ma'am and no ma'am. So I told him how nice the colored people in the South were and that nobody ever had to tell them a thing about it they are

so good-tempered and have so much natural refinement about some things. You know they just watch the white people the *quality* they call them Nathan I said and imitate them — that means do exactly the way the white people their masters do and that's the reason all the negro-servants have such lovely manners now don't you think you could do that? He looked at me and said in his drawl Well but Mrs. Ducey I haven't seen any white person I wanted to imitate *yet. Did you ever Ma?* That's just a sample of the kind of thing you get from servants up here. I said Nathan there is one thing I *won't* have and that is impertinence and I shall tell Mr. Ducey what you have said and I went back to the house. So when Will came home I told him and he was *very* angry and was going out to send Nathan right off when Uncle George who happened to be here stuck in *his* oar and I must say I think he is very dictatorial and said he'd rather have a rude boy hoeing beans and minding his business than a polite one who wasn't worth his salt like all the rest we'd had except Nathan. And he said if we dismissed him we'd be the losers for a boy like that could get a job anywhere and he'd probably be better satisfied some place where the lady of the house didn't hold up niggers for him to pattern after. Of course I hadn't done anything of the kind but there is no use trying to argue with Uncle George he is so obstinate the only way to do is to go ahead and have your own way and let him growl around. But Will crinkled right down and said he guessed it was more ignorance than impudence on Nathan's part and maybe I'd just better let him alone in future. William does make me so mad sometimes he thinks because Uncle George set him up in business when we came here to live that he has to be influenced by everything Uncle George says when dear knows he's paid Uncle George ten times over not in money I believe he owes him some yet but in other ways. Just look at the perfectly *wonderful* way he's run the store there isn't such another man in a thousand. But I simply was *not* going to be *bulldozed* that way so I just said Very well if Nathan can get another job so readily he may try I am very glad to hear it but I will *not* submit to impudent servants and you know mother how much will-power I have even Uncle George can't bend me when I *know* I'm *right.* I was going out to dismiss him myself when luckily for Nathan

Georgie the child has the *sweetest* disposition began to cry and said Oh please Ma don't send Nathan away oh please don't he's promised to take me out hunting some day and he said he'd teach me to swim. And then he went on and begged so hard I just couldn't help giving in — the dear little fellow! So Nathan got off for once but it shan't happen again for I won't put up with any such behavior.

George and Francie are in the wildest state of excitement about seeing Grandma. Georgie has been going around for days saying Oh I wonder if she's brought my bonearrers. I couldn't imagine what *bonearrers* was until by questioning I found out he meant a *bow-and-arrows* which you promised him last year. Francie insists that you said you would give them to him if he learned Instruct me in Thy statutes Lord Thy righteous paths display so as to say it off without a mistake the whole hymn. But she is probably only saying so to tease him for he vows you never said anything of the sort and he is a very truthful child as you know. Francie herself is perfectly *immersed* in making you a bead reticule out of lavender silk twist crocheted with steel beads in a Greek Key pattern she got out of Godey's. Of course she can't do it and has to ravel it out and fix it over again a dozen times a day I believe she goes to bed with it and it will be as black as the chimney-back before she's finished it but she *will* do it you never saw such persistence. The child is not the least like dear Sister she's *all* Blake. The other day I heard her out in the kitchen asking Mary if she wouldn't please do something for her. I called her right in to me and said Francie dear that is not the way for a little lady to speak to the servants you must always be nice and pleasant but *never* say *please* or *thank you* that's for them to say to *you*. She didn't seem to understand at all and I had the greatest trouble explaining to her about keeping them in their places. She's not very quick you know altho' a good sweet child as any child of Sister's would be sure to be.

I must close this letter or it won't get off and I'm right down at the bottom of the page anyhow. With dear love

ANN.

CHAPTER V

In which we hear a Little Ancient History

Long years before the hot radiant summer afternoon on which the last of those letters of which Chapter Four is made up was written and despatched by that lightning-footed messenger Finnell's Coach, long before there were any coaches or any roads in that part of the world or indeed any State of Ohio or State of Louisiana, and long before Mr. Nat Burke arrived to confer immortality upon his particular section of the country, old George Marsh set foot for the first time upon the soil of the New World at Castle Garden; and looking about him, I daresay with some wonder but very little concern, struck out with a sturdy heart into the strong current of adventure. He was not *old* George Marsh in those days, however; he was twenty-one or -two, not much the senior of the Republic whereof he proposed to become a citizen, when the brig *Royal Charlotte*, forty-seven days out from Bristol, discharged him upon the pier at New York with a little ready money in his pockets and the rest of his savings (thirty odd pounds) sewed into the lining of his waistcoat. It was good West-of-England broadcloth, that waistcoat, and George wore it for ten years, until his increasing girth obliged him regretfully to put it aside. Already this emigrant displayed some of the qualities of a desirable member of the commonwealth; among them a solid intelligence and a slow yet trustworthy sense of humor, a surprisingly clear, cool, and hard head for so young a man, entire honesty coupled with shrewdness, an aptitude for affairs, and a constitution that carried him in triumph to the age of fourscore, undeterred by a dozen changes of climate, the ordinary accidents and misadventures of life, the fevers of the soil, and the murderous medical practice of his day.

He came, he stayed, he prospered. George had learned no profession nor trade, his gifts not lying in that direction,

but at any sort of bet, bargain, or dicker he achieved almost from the first essay a notable success. People talked familiarly or contemptuously of Marsh's luck; but in Burke's observation — which, to be sure, only embraced some half-score of his later years — there was no such thing; it was Marsh's temperament, Marsh's robust and steadfast confidence in himself. He was not reckless, he was never foolishly sanguine or uplifted; he would as soon have thrown his dollars in the fire as gone about boasting of how he made them and would make more. The core and secret of his success might, perhaps, be found in an utter lack of imagination, a kind of inability to perceive that things might turn to the bad for him; truly they never did, but George Marsh wasted no sleepless nights in worry about that possibility. By dint of believing in himself he won, without effort, the belief of others — *potest quia posse videtur!* His was the stolid and unemotional faith of the Briton, who would not know if he should be beaten, and out of this nettle danger will invariably pluck this flower safety.

Old George, by the time Burke came to know him, possessed few other distinctively British characteristics; he never went back to visit his native land, and became within a short while of his landing thoroughly Americanized in dress, speech, and habits of mind. If he did not go about dragging his coat-tails in the presence of the mother country, — such being the approved and popular attitude of that day for most Columbian patriots, — it was because that method of displaying one's opinions was foreign to his character and indeed moved him to saturnine merriment. After a residence of some eight or ten years in the city of New York, during which he turned over his thirty pounds many times and acquired something of a name for parts and prudence, he left his affairs there under a trusted surveillance, and started for the South in search of new commercial worlds to conquer. He was now a well-established and well-to-do bachelor of thirty; the century was drawing to its close, and the Louisiana Purchase or who knows what other mighty changes looming on the horizon. For all Marsh's prosaic turn, and oddly at variance with it, there must have been a sort of reserve fund of restlessness, enterprise, and desire of adventure within him. It may be that is what beguiled him over-seas

in the beginning. Whatever feeling moved him, it was something that could no longer be satisfied by his real-estate, mortgage-and-loan activities in New York; and it is strange to behold this hard, resolute, acute, and thorough man of business, uninfluenced by boyish dreams or illusions, deliberately handing over all that he had worked so steadily to gain into the power of an always problematical deputy and departing, serene of mind, upon a hazard of new fortunes. When Burke got to know him well enough, he once ventured to probe him with a question or two about this action. "I wonder, Mr. Marsh," said Nathan, "that you had the hardihood to intrust your business to anybody but yourself and walk off to New Orleans with a bag of money to see what could be done there. The whole thing might have gone up the chimney in the time it took to send a letter in those days. Didn't it ever occur to you that your partner might — ? An honest man makes terribly costly mistakes sometimes, and a dishonest one with such opportunities —!" The old fellow shifted his tobacco, eying his questioner, and spat into one of the three-cornered wooden boxes filled with white sand or sawdust that were kept about the store for that purpose. "No, I never worried," he said; "you see, Nat, I'd picked the right man."

With the advantage of added years, experience, and a much larger capital Marsh did as well in New Orleans as he had in New York, although from the first he had no great liking for either the climate or the conditions. "Your money come pretty near *too* easy," Burke has heard him say. "People lived high, made a lot, spent a lot. It's that way all over the South. I lived in all about ten years there, but I never liked it — never liked it. I got out quick as I heard they were opening the Northwest Territory and going to make States out of it. I wouldn't ever advise any young man to go South to *live*. Oh, I don't say but what it's a good place to make money in — to trade to, you know. I've done considerable of that in my time, sending flatboats down the river. Steam navigation's about knocked all that business into a cocked hat, though, nowadays. You can send your goods down just the same, but the freight charges are so much higher there ain't the profits in it there used to be. A whole fleet of flatboats hardly cost you anything in those days. Everybody's

got a kind of rage for hurry, now.[1] You mark my words, the minute these railroads get good and going — and it won't take long — the minute that happens, then the whole canal-boat trade will go to glory! That's my judgment, sir, and I ain't often mistaken. I've sold out what I held in the Miami and the Erie for that very reason — no use waiting till the bottom falls out of 'em. The other fellow can do that and then scoot around and scare up a buyer for his stock if he can; I'll salt *my* money away somewhere else. Now the South hasn't got any railroads or any canals, either; they think down there that this steamboat traffic on the Mississippi is going to last 'em till the end of time. It won't. It won't. Not if I know anything about it. You let some fellow with a little get-up-and-get come along and go to building a railroad or two, and where'll your steamboat be? It's looking a good ways ahead, but it's bound to come. Only thing is, they're slow down there — that's what I couldn't stand when I lived there — they're slow and they're fairly et up with niggers. That's why I say South's no place for a young man. Make your money off 'em if you want to, but don't live there."

Mr. Marsh's own career bore out his theories. He turned his attention chiefly to the sugar and cotton markets while in New Orleans, and I believe made the bulk of his fortune there, coming away towards 1810 a much wealthier man than when he had arrived a decade earlier. This too, despite the fact that after having been two or three years in the city and observing a number of good opportunities, he had, acting with his customary promptness and decision, written to a younger brother in Bristol, paid his passage out, and set him up in business at a heavy outlay which, by the way, he never entirely recovered — perhaps never expected to recover. George was reputed a hard man, yet he was a good son, a good brother. I have seen some of the letters he wrote the family — a patriarchal English family of at least a dozen children — whom he left behind in Bristol. They are kind, blunt missives; he sent them money; he made them presents: Virginia tobacco, New England rum, and maple-sugar, a pair of white doeskin moccasins embroidered with beads and

[1] These words of wisdom were probably uttered about the year 1840. What would old Marsh say now?

colored quills that he got of some Indian trader in what dusky wigwam of the wilderness for a little sister Sukey, of whom he was very fond. The child died in a consumption before these trifles reached her — a tragedy sad by its very littleness. The family seem to have taken this liberality as their due; there is generally some one member of a connection playing Providence for all the rest. They accepted George's offerings and asked for more, told him their debts and distresses, reminded him of all the birthdays and weddings, thanked him and prayed for his welfare in good set terms. And followed his mandates with tolerable faithfulness considering the distance of a thousand leagues or so from whence he issued them. In no one of their letters, not even his widowed mother's, have I been able to discover a single reference to his coming home; nor does he ever seem to have looked forward to a return and reunion himself. It was not long after his mother's death, when the family, what with marriages and other deaths, seemed to be about to disintegrate, as families do, that George wrote to his brother Walter, suggesting the young man's journey to America. Walter came pliably enough; and it must have been a strange meeting. The brothers had not seen each other for twenty years; Walter was a mere child when George left home. Were they pleased, surprised, disappointed? Old George, in later years, rarely referred to his brother, and then with a certain tolerance or negligence — quite unconscious, I am sure — as if he might have been speaking of a child. He was so much older than the other, and of so essentially different a character and experience, that they could not in nature have been companions. Perhaps George found it unexpectedly difficult to hold Walter up to his standards of business energy; he may have discovered in his junior occasional obliquities and weaknesses for which, in his harsh judgment, there was no excuse. It is undeniable that W. MARSH, PRODUCE AND COMMISSION, the concern that started out with so fine a flourish, would have gone to the wall half a dozen times but for George's money, his clear head, his quick and vigorous action. It was not long before George Marsh, who had not lived and labored to the age of forty without becoming pretty conversant with men and the world at large, relegated his brother to a shelf of ample salary and almost no duties, "picked out the right

man," according to his habit, for the management of the produce-and-commission business and turned his own eyes to the great Northwest Territory and the new fields. He wearied of the lotos, this hardy Ulysses, stable of purpose among all his wanderings. Gladly he resigned to Walter that pursuit of making money too easily — or of spending it more easily still, for which the younger man had exhibited such an aptitude. George did not commit the mistake of supposing that he had enlisted Walter's gratitude and affection by his generous provision; he knew better. That is a brave soul that can support the sense of obligation nobly. Do you and I like the man we owe? Would we not rather a thousand times he owed us, no matter what our loss and inconvenience? And am I grateful or am I only anxious to pay him off and be done with him? Of all the fantastic masks wherein humanity delights to trick itself, I think that Gratitude and Benovolence wear the most ironic face. Here lies Lazarus at my gate — a painful sight, for I am a compassionate creature. Faugh! Take the poor wretch up, see to his sores, feed him, shelter and comfort him, not alone that he may suffer less, but that I may sleep a little better. Do you wonder that he is not always grateful? The fact is that Lazarus, being whole once more, is ashamed of the ditch, and the doorstep, and the curs that licked him. He would be as well pleased never to see me again who put him in mind of his degradation; he wants, naturally enough, to pay me out and go his way and forget that miserable hour.

Walter may have chafed under the burden of George's liberality, but he never made any effort towards discharging that account; and, after all, George had taken the responsibility of transplanting his brother and in conscience he should bear the costs. Unlike his senior, Walter took very kindly to the semi-tropic heats, the linen clothes, the Panama straws, the juleps, the gumbos, the dazzlingly pretty girls, and fire-eating gallants of his adopted country. Walter was a good-looking and highly ornamental young man, a dandy, a great beau. In a society where perhaps birth and pedigree counted more than in any other city on the continent, it was particularly easy to believe the report mysteriously spread abroad shortly after his arrival that he was the banished scion of some illustrious house, instead of the fifth

or sixth son of an honest green-grocer of Bristol. And if that did not exactly account for his brother George, it was also quite easy to believe that the name and relationship, for some romantic reason, were alike a blind. Even George himself never denied it. He used to grin diabolically, watching his brother cringe and change color when these stories were hinted at in their joint presence. "Ask *him*, he'll tell you," he would say. "Isn't it strange how such a tale should have got around? Ask *him*, sir; I know my place; I ain't going to tell tales out o' school. *I* can't say anything — but, honestly now, d'ye think we look much alike?" In fact, George, who was ten or twelve years older than the other, who wore a coat five seasons behind the fashion, who chewed tobacco, who sometimes went unshaved for days, who tied his neckcloth like a halter and was sadly indifferent to the state of his wristbands and finger-nails, who shunned the society of women and was only too ready with an oath or a foul word — honest, coarse, hard-headed, bargain-driving George showed no sort of resemblance to Walter, than whom a finer young gentleman never existed. The institution of slavery appeared to him extremely beneficial to all parties concerned, whereas George, for sundry utilitarian reasons, disapproved of it. One of Walter's earliest acts was to provide himself with a lively and well-trained body-servant, for whom George paid fourteen hundred dollars, getting a slight discount at that. George owned no slaves himself; he knotted his unspeakable cravat with his own hands; his boots went unblacked — why not? *He* could afford to please himself, and we may imagine that Walter many a time viewed with envy that slattern independence. Riches and poverty can do as they choose; it is the middleman that must keep up an appearance. I knew a millionnaire once that wore a straw hat all winter! If I should try it, my friends would have me in the poor-house the next day. George was not a millionnaire, but there was plenty of money in the pockets of those soiled, shiny, old drab breeches, and Walter lived on him, and disliked him, and was afraid of him in true brotherly fashion.

Some time in 1805 Walter married. He married Cornelia, second daughter of Daniel Patrick, Esquire of Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana. George, who was away in the North at

the time of the wedding (a good deal to Walter's relief), professed to regard the match as a prodigious stroke of business. "Three hundred niggers! By damn, Walt's done better than I looked for!" he said with a sardonic relish; "trouble is, it's a whaling big family and there won't be so much apiece when the slaves and the plantation come to be divided up among 'em. However, they'll always have a roof over their heads and a belly-full of victuals, anyhow." Such was Mr. Marsh's enlightened attitude towards the holy estate of matrimony. He relaxed somewhat upon meeting the bride, who was a pretty, gentle, fond, young creature. "I — I hope you'll be happy with Walter, my dear," he said, holding her timid little hand awkwardly; "'tain't all roses, you know — a person's got to take the world as it comes. Don't be afraid of me — I'm kind of rough, I reckon, but you won't see me often. Here's a little something to buy knick-knacks with. Name one of the babies Sukey, will you?" Little Mrs. Walter shrunk from him in spite of his gruff kindness; she clung to her Walter whom she thought the handsomest, cleverest, most noble man in the world, and wondered how he could have such a brother. Was it true that Walt was really the son of the Earl of Langham and his name not Marsh at all, and George only his father's factor? Walter hushed her questions with a mystic smile. But that story survives yet among some of their numerous descendants, and will probably be in circulation on the Day of Doom.

George Marsh, in accordance with his prediction, was not a frequent visitor at his brother's house. Walter never could have been much at ease in his company, and more than likely Mrs. Walter found it hard to endure his slovenly habits, his coarse manners, the overbearing style in which he sometimes addressed her precious Walter, who was too *generous* and too thoroughly a *gentleman* ever to resent it. George meant well, George had a kind heart, she knew that, but, mercy —! George understood her; her little patient or patronizing airs moved him at once with a cynical amusement and a kind of pity. I have no doubt he had his hours of lonesomeness and longing, this middle-aged, unlovely sceptic; he would have liked a little affection, this shaggy bug-bear, under whose eyes the negro servants trembled, flying about their work with a frantic energy. His brother's

little girls received his presents in awestruck silence, or were made to thank Uncle George in neat, cut-and-dried speeches; they never dreamed of loving him, and he was by far too much of a philosopher to expect it. When these weak desires assailed him, he probably shut them out of his heart, and turned with a greater zest to his desk and ledgers. Nobody knew how much George was worth by this time; indeed he went North for good five or six years after the marriage, and thenceforward was seldom seen in New Orleans. He settled himself (permanently at last) in Ohio, took up land right and left, bought, sold, loaned, borrowed, turned his dollars about and about, shrewd, confident, and successful as always. The second war with Great Britain came on, passed over with a financial panic, a wake of hard times, yet left George Marsh unscathed. The last visit he made to the South was in 1817, after his brother's death, when he went to settle up Walter's affairs, which were in a very involved state. "They'd about run through everything," he told Burke years — twenty-five years — afterwards in one of his moments of confidence; "I saved what I could out of the muddle for Cornelia, but it was so little she thinks to this day that Brother George 'took advantage.' *She* couldn't tell what was being done, and she only knows they always lived very handsomely and had everything they wanted, and it was certainly very strange that when poor Walt died, Brother George should come along and take charge of everything and presently tell her there wasn't anything left! Of course I 'took advantage' — that's how I made my money, 'taking advantage,' hey? Lord love you, Nathan Burke, that's what a man gets for being saving and upright and industrious and careful. I'm a rich man, and Walter died, and when I wound up his affairs, the widow and orphans didn't get anything — therefore I fleeced 'em. Logical, ain't it? I set him up in business and kept him going for years — and here I am rolling in money and he was fairly smothered with debts — so, of course, I must have cheated him. That follows, don't it? I pay my debts and work hard and live straight and my neighbor trusts me because I've always treated him square — so it's perfectly natural for me to turn around and skin my own brother's children — oh, yes! By God, they wanted to have a funeral that would have cost a thousand dollars, and the

very shirt Walt died in wasn't paid for. I'll bet there wasn't a loan-shark in N'Orleans I didn't dicker and jaw into some kind of compromise — and if I hadn't, where'd they have been? On the county, sir! Cornelia's relatives couldn't do a thing for her — they were all in the same box together — nice, pleasant, good-looking, easy-going lot you couldn't trust with money any more than you could a child. They didn't like me — Lord, no! But, by damn, sir, they found me mighty convenient. Oh, well, you can't blame a woman — what do they know about it? Cornelia knows at the bottom of her heart that I've done pretty well by her and the girls; likely she thinks it's because I'm kind of remorseful. But they know I've done what was right by 'em in the long run. They ain't any of 'em mercenary — at least they ain't conscious of it — they do their best to be kind and civil to me. They think Uncle George is a pretty rough customer, and if I was a poor old man and had to be taken care of, they wouldn't be fighting for the job — but they'd do it, in the end. They're all right; their hearts are in the right place. Most peoples' are, Nat, most peoples' are. Almost everybody does what's right. You'd rather, you know, even if you got the little end of the bargain by it. Cornelia and the girls just think it ain't very nice to have me 'round spitting tobacco-juice all over their nice new carpets — what d'ye call 'em — Wilton? But they ain't really mercenary — they'd just about as lief have my money as not, but they ain't sitting around waiting for me to die. 'Tain't many people that are as mean as *that*. No, they ain't mercenary — only I bet ther'd have been hell to pay if I'd ever wanted to get married — ho, ho!"

Old George told the bare truth when he said (very simply and with no notion of vaunting himself) that he had done well by his brother's children. He would have brought them all North and made a home for them if the poor widow had not tragically insisted on going back to her mother on the Avoyelles plantation. He sent the girls to school; he provided them handsomely with clothes, trinkets, pocket-money; he had them North regularly every summer and took them on delightful jaunts even as far as Philadelphia and New York; and gave them royal presents as they successively married. It is doubtful whether they would have fared as

well had their father lived. All the girls married absurdly young according to present-day ideas; and, as they were a prolific race the family with these ramifications is scattered widely up and down all our Southern States. The oldest daughter was the only one of them who married in the North, having met William Ducey while on one of their visits to Uncle George. The old man never interposed any advice about these matches. "It's a kind of hit-or-miss business anyhow, marrying," was his philosophic creed; and it is only fair to say that they all turned out very well — all but one, that is.

It was several years before Burke, who was not troubling his head much at that time about the Marshes and their affairs, learned what Mrs. Cornelia Marsh and all her family considered the ghastly circumstances of Cornelia the younger's marriage. They kept poor little Francie's parentage as secret as if there had been something disgraceful about it; and it happened that Mr. Marsh was the person who enlightened Nathan by casually mentioning some of the facts in the course of talk one day. It never would have entered into old George's mind that the subject was one either to be avoided or gossiped over; he was without affectations; and I have forgot now what led him to refer to it. "Connie — my niece, Cornelia, Francie's mother, you know — was the prettiest one of the girls," he said; "just about set her mother wild when she run off and married an actor. So far as I know he was a decent enough fellow and treated Connie right. But they've always had a great notion of *family*, and I guess Cornelia had looked pretty high for Connie — wanted her to marry some rich planter's son, likely — she might have been a heap worse off. I'm a plain man myself — I don't go much on family. Only objection I could see to it was that actors are a kind of shiftless, hand-to-mouth set, and Connie mightn't have had a very comfortable time of it. She didn't live to find out, poor girl! They both died within a week of each other — of the fever, you know — down there in N'Orleans the summer of '29 or '30, I forget which. They'd only been married a year or so and just had the one little girl. Ducey was in business down there and not doing very well, either, betwixt you and me and the post. His wife got scared, and you know when Anne Ducey's got her head

set, Burke, there ain't anybody can do a thing with her; the fever got pretty bad, and she just made Ducey pack up and let the business go to pelhenny and took her own baby and little Francie and cleared out for Ohio and Uncle George. Young man, what did I tell you? The South ain't any place to *live* in!"

CHAPTER VI

Res Angusta Domi

If Nathan had known what was within those letters of Mrs. Ducey's which he so carefully carried to the post for her, he might possibly, even at that early date, have felt the same twitch of amusement with which he read them in after days. We may not want our valets to think us heroes, but let no man disregard his servant's opinion of him or suppose that he permits himself no criticisms. If all the hirelings could get the public ear and valorously tell all they know and have seen, what a destruction of reputations there would be, and what a reversal of sentiment! In six weeks Nat, who was only a boy and not an unusually gifted boy at that, or any way more astute than others, knew Mrs. Ducey with a perfect thoroughness and certainty, whereas she knew him not at all. In fact, the idea that a hired man could have a character other than the marketable one for honesty and sobriety would have struck her as a laughable novelty, in the way of theories. Perhaps if he had been a woman, Nathan, like the other maidservants, would not have remained long in the Ducey household; but belonging to the opposite sex he very soon unconsciously adopted towards Mrs. Anne the attitude of her husband, her uncle, every man with whom she came in contact — an attitude of humorous and affectionate tolerance. Her prettiness delighted the senses; her unreasonableness tickled infinitely; there was to the masculine mind something amusingly womanly and winning in her sweet-tempered obstinacy; she was so anxious to be kind one forgot that she was not in the least humane. What man ever lived who demanded that a woman should be logical? What man ever seriously resented a woman's tyrannies? Here I sit who have paraded at the head of armies and issued centurion's orders, here I most abjectly sit, a petticoat-governed man, and care not who knows it! My daughter commands me to eat oatmeal porridge which

I abhor — but do I rebel? Not I. I sit down and eat it! I swathe myself in loathed woollens, I swallow quarts of abominable physic at her behest. Unquestionably I wouldn't do it for my son; I would invite him with much forcible language to mind his business and let me alone. My son and I would have a more peaceable house, but would it be so happy? I think not. My daughter would endure tortures, she would lie through thick and thin to save me from an entirely just and merited punishment — but she wouldn't trust me with the brandy bottle! Yet she knows me to be a temperate man, she believes with all her heart and soul that I am a gentleman. She stoutly supports the theory that her father is the greatest warrior, statesman, jurist that ever existed — and then she reads the old fellow lectures becoming to an audience of fifteen-year-old children. I fear they fall on unfruitful soil, like some of those Nat Burke used to receive from Mrs. Ducey, forty odd years ago.

The boy always tried to listen respectfully; he cut the grass, he rubbed the harness, he groomed the horses to the best of his ability, feeling first surprise, then perhaps a little resentment, and then a profound and lasting amusement at Mrs. Ducey's painstaking supervision. She stung his pride to the quick, yet for the soul of him Nathan could not be angry with her. There was, after all, something attractively free and fearless in her absurd bullying, her supreme confidence that she was always in the right; a certain strength of character showed through all her suspicion and stubbornness. Nathan, who could not have understood any of these fine phrases at the time, nevertheless obscurely felt their meaning. He used to observe the Marys, Susans, Bridgets, who filed in and out of the Ducey kitchen, some angry and impudent, some forlorn, bewildered, futilely protesting, with a puzzled wonder. Why was it that none of them could get along with Mrs. Ducey? *He* had no trouble. She — why, she didn't *mean* anything — you just had to know how to take her. And look how kind and good she was if you were sick or hurt yourself — or anything. These arguments, when he occasionally advanced them, were without effect; one and all, the cooks and chambermaids turned on him with helpless fury. What did *he* know about it — nothing but a boy. They wouldn't be talked to that way

by Mrs. Ducey, talked to as if they was — as if they was — they was respectable girls, they wouldn't go for to do any such thing as Mrs. Ducey said they did. They were doing their best, and everything can't always be right, and they hadn't any more idea where her silver pickle-tongs was than the man in the moon, and it was the first time they had ever burned anything, and they worked hard, and they never slapped Georgie in the world, he told a big story when he said they did, and indeed you may talk your head off, Eliza, for all the good it'll do you, she'll just say "H'm!" And — oh, shut up, Nathan, you ain't nothing but a *boy!* Heavens, how many of these shabby little dramas did Nat witness! They passed over without leaving much impression on him; he supposed all feminine households were the same; it was in the nature of women shut up in the house together all day long to squabble, he opined. When, as sometimes happened, his employer surreptitiously stole out and bestowed on the departing ones kind words and a little extra money, the boy viewed that proceeding with utter contempt. If Ducey was going to let his wife *run* things, he ought to *let* her, Nat thought in his sharp, boyish judgment; he could not understand why, if Ducey disapproved of these domestic changes, he allowed them and compounded with the sufferers after this feeble fashion. Nat forgot the peace-at-any-price policy that often controlled his own relations,with Mrs. Anne. He only saw that Ducey loved his wife, petted her, gave in to her, teased, played with, and spoiled her, as no man should a grown sensible woman — and in spite of all, Nathan thought the gray mare was the better horse. The boy, from the detachment of his position, saw with the uncanny clearness of vision belonging to his years that there was something at once foolish and wrong-headed in William Ducey's attitude towards his wife. Anne had enough of character, of heart, of good sound sense; she need not be treated like a child. William alternately lavished money on her and complained about the bills, scolded her, made fun of her, offered her amends with presents, flowers, gimcracks, bonbons, toys for Georgie, and what-not. By turns he was master in his own house and slave; whereas Anne, at least, was a consistent despot. Her mind and methods were alike direct; she had her way by force and arms, with

no thought of evasion or compromise, the ordinary feminine arts being entirely unknown to her. She never persuaded, she commanded, equally tactless and truthful. She loved and admired her husband beyond measure; she was not at all vain, but she delighted in being pretty for his sake, and would spend hours dressing her hair, or prinking before her mirror, to please him. All her tyranny was exerted solely to make his home comfortable and happy; she had a spirit so willing, so gay, so generous, and lovable it was a shame to make a baby of her. But fifteen years of married life had accomplished that end as nearly as possible with a character intrinsically so strong as Mrs. Ducey's; and Nathan himself joined in the conspiracy.

William Ducey at this time was a tall, slender, rather Byronic-looking gentleman, extremely pale or sallow, with a kind of melancholy distinction about him, which, in spite of his wife's fond pride, was, as it were, quite without foundation. Yes, appearances and Mrs. Ducey to the contrary notwithstanding, William was a very everyday mortal of an amiable, easy-going disposition, upright and kind-hearted and without especial talents in any direction. He had thick, black, and shining hair which he was exceedingly particular about keeping well oiled and in a great state of curl; a neat and I daresay tolerably expensive taste in waistcoats; and a perfectly unromantic wholesale-grocery business downtown. WILLIAM DUCEY & Co. flourished in gilt letters above the door: and, at short intervals, there appeared in the *Journal*, according to the naïve custom of our day, advertisements of "goods now unloading and for sale," or "rec'd per late arrivals:

50 Drums Codfish:
20 Tierces Rice:
13 Casks Winter Sperm Oil:
100 Bbls. Molasses:
80 Bags Pimento:
60 Bales Sisal Hemp:
12 Boxes Assorted Fruits:
5 do; do; Havana Sweetmeats," etc.

In the course of time Nathan, journeying thither almost daily on the household errands, became pretty intimate in

this establishment. A staff of active young clerks, some of them no older than himself, officiated amongst the spices, sugars, and sacks of coffee, the Sisal Hemp, and all the rest of it. Mr. Ducey presided in a grimy little office, divided off at the rear of the long warehouse by a high wooden partition with panes of window-glass let into the upper third of it for extra light. But *did* Mr. Ducey preside? There he always sat enthroned at his desk in a majestic pose of business absorption, surrounded by bill-files and heaped papers; but Nat had a suspicion strengthened by the nods, winks, grins, and obscure jokes of the shirt-sleeved brigade in front that this section of the premises was really the den and stronghold of Co. — Co., who sported a mangy old brown beaver hat and an old blue broadcloth tail-coat, white at all the seams, with the brass edges of its huge buttons cutting through the stuff that covered them; Co., who was not at all fastidious about *his* bristling stiff white hair, whose striped satinet waistcoat was furrowed with trenches filled with powdered tobacco, who went like as not with the straps burst under his soiled old cassimere breeches, and trailing about his instep; Co., who got down an hour earlier than anybody else in the morning, and stayed to see the shutters up at night; who looked over the balance-sheet every month, every week, every day for what I know, cursing and growling and whistling under his breath; who knew the name and amount of sales of every clerk in the place; whose little sharp old eyes beneath their heavy brows missed nothing that went on from the top floor to the cellar — Co., who, in short, was known outside these precincts and to society at large by the style and title of Mr. George Marsh. Any hour of the day you might hear him behind his fastnesses, expounding some point of trade in his coarse, strong, deliberate voice from which fifty years of America had eliminated every trace of British accent or pronunciation, to a customer, perhaps even to Ducey himself. It was not a pleasant voice, nor was his at all a pleasing personality, but the sound and presence of this old man inspired confidence and a certain enthusiasm of industry; if those young clerks feared him, they also liked him; they respected his power, his success. They all knew or suspected that Marsh's money had founded and was backing DUCEY & Co., though upon what terms,

they could, of course, only guess. The head book-keeper used to deliver himself quite freely to Nathan in moments of privacy when Ducey had gone home to dinner and Co. had repaired to *his* midday meal at the Erin-go-Bragh coffee-house, up High Street a little way, and just across from the Court-house.

"Yah! Ducey! Why, he don't amount to a hill o' beans," this devoted servitor would remark, tilting his chair to the rear legs, and propping his heels on Ducey's august desk; "Marsh is the backbone of this business and *I* do the figgering — that don't leave much room for Ducey, I guess. Where does he come in, hey? When one of your farmer friends comes in for a trade, who does the talking? Ducey? Not by a long shot, he don't. It's Marsh. When he wants to know anything, who does he ask? Ducey? No, sirr-ee. He turns to me and says: 'Quilldriver, what price did we make Laughlin Bros. on that last lot o' mess pork — seventy barrels, wasn't it?' You bet he *knows*, too. He's got it figgered down to a jay-bird's toe. If I ever start in business for myself —"

And so on, and so forth, thus Mr. Quilldriver — not his name, by the way, but in truth I cannot remember it, and have only in mind a vivid picture of this sprightly young gentleman and most expert accountant, with a pen behind his ear, cleaning his nails at leisure with a pearl-handled knife the while he holds agreeable converse with Nat Burke, who perhaps has come for a portion of those "5 do; do; Havana Sweetmeats" and is waiting for it to be weighed and tied up. "Course you don't want to go blatting this all over town," says the book-keeper, warningly; "but you ain't much on the talk, Nat, and that's the reason I'm telling you — I wouldn't talk like this to everybody and anybody, understand?" Wouldn't you, oh, reticent Mr. Quilldriver? Nat was one of the somewhat taciturn people in whom, whether he will or no, everybody confides; I should not care to record all the hopes, fears, plans, complaints, protestations to which he has listened in his time. Some feeling of loyalty withheld him from airing his own views about his employers to the others; but he could not close his ears to theirs; the young fellows *would* talk, and after all they told him nothing but what he knew or had guessed already.

Mr. Ducey, in the lofty abstraction of his affairs, rarely noticed Nat's visits to the store and requisitions of soap, tea, starch, sugar, the hundred-and-one items Mrs. Ducey was constantly needing; but old George, for whom no detail of the business was too insignificant, speedily observed him, and, metaphorically speaking, jotted him down in some mental memorandum for future reference. "Is that the Burke boy?" he would bawl out from the back of the store, where, in the intervals of his activity, he would be sprawled in an ancient split-bottomed arm-chair, reading a trade journal, or making calculations with a scrap of paper and a pencil-stub on the back of his greasy pocket-book. There was absolutely no need for the old man's industry and application; he had reached an age when most men would have been content to take their ease with so large a fortune as he had amassed. But work was the breath of his nostrils; to match his wits and will against those of other men his only recreation. You may see many such in the American business world; and there is something not far from pathetic in the spectacle of our commercial veterans spirited in harness to the end, so gallant in work, so touchingly helpless and awkward in play. By way of taking his one and only relaxation, old George, when trade was dull, would sometimes come out from his sanctum and move about freely among the attentive clerks with whom he would be quite jocose and familiar — and you may be sure they listened deferentially and guffawed at all his jokes, which were frequently pretty high flavored. Nathan, to whom Mr. Marsh had spoken directly only three or four times since the boy first saw him, was not aware of having attracted his attention at all, until the old man stopped in front of him one day as he waited on his errand, and remarked with a grin:—

"You're the boy, I understand, who never says anything but 'yes'm' and 'no'm.' Young man, haven't you got any better manners than that? Don't you ever talk any?"

"Not unless I've got something to say," said Nat, a little surprised.

The other looked at him with some interest, and turned his quid, staring meditatively.

"That's right, son, stick to that," he said at last, nodding. "Let the other fellow do the talking — if he keeps it up for

half an hour, he'll tell you what sort of man he is. How old are you?"

"I'll be seventeen the first of the year," Nathan told him.

"You look older. Pretty near got your growth, I guess. What's that you've got?"

"It's five pounds of Rio Mrs. Ducey wanted," said Nat, preparing to depart.

"I don't mean that — I mean that book in your side pocket. Give it here," said the old man, bending a sharp glance on him from under his shelving brows.

"It's a school-book — a grammar," said the boy, flushing a little, but meeting the other's eye as he handed over the volume. It had been knocking about in his pocket, so that he might have it handy for reading at odd times, yet was fairly clean and well kept, for Nat had a certain reverence for books, and besides had this not cost a dollar and a half of his monthly wage at Riley's Book-store some three weeks previously? Old Marsh grunted, "Huh!" took the grammar, which was one of Mr. Murray's, if I recollect aright, and ran a swift eye over it. He returned it with the natural question: —

"Ever gone to school any?"

"A little when I was a boy — when I was a little fellow, I mean," Nat added, smiling himself as he detected a momentary twinkle in Mr. Marsh's deep-set eyes. "There wan't — there wasn't any district-school near enough for us to go to regular — regularly, I mean."

"Can you figger any?"

"Not much good at it," said Nathan, taking up his package of coffee; and old Mr. Marsh finally allowed him to go. The boy knew that his slight affairs would not occupy the other's mind for long. George Marsh had no time to waste on his niece's hired man; still he felt some anxiety lest the old gentleman should casually mention this occurrence to Mrs. Ducey, and devoutly hoped he would forget all about it. Nat knew instinctively that that lady would consider books or any kind of book-learning the last thing in the world with which her chore-boy should meddle. Murray's Grammar, indeed! And why wasn't he digging the potatoes, pray tell? What would she say to Nat's slender battery of knowledge ranged on the little shelf of his stable room, to

the blurred copy-books over which he toiled by candle-light, perspiring in the hot summer nights, surrounded by a halo of gnats and moth millers? From the summit of my years I look down upon him with mingled sympathy and amusement. He labors at his pot-hooks and capital-letters with the aid of an unsteady little deal table not large enough to accommodate the ink-bottle and his elbows at the same time. The bottle must be perilously balanced on the corner of the bed, and to this day he will reach and dip the pen with a wary hand, so firmly was that habit established. Once (horror!) Mr. Burke upset it all over the clean patchwork counterpane; a benevolent cook, understanding his fears, washed the stain out for him by stealth — may her reward be great! That there is no royal road to learning Nathan could testify by hard experience; it was bestrewn — in his case — with the gory remains of dead mosquitoes and other night-flying gentry, for one thing. Yet once his desire was aroused it was in his nature to persevere; and there is this much to say for these late beginners that with ordinary gifts they will learn more thoroughly and apply what they learn with far greater readiness and accuracy than children of the usual age put down to study the same lesson. Almost all the knowledge we acquire before fourteen years or so is purely a mechanical accomplishment — a sort of feat of memory and nothing more. No one would advocate putting off a child's schooling until he reaches that age, but Nathan's experience is a living proof that the lost years need not be a serious drawback. There was nothing of the genius about him; he mastered the art of reading, naturally, with greater facility than the other branches, and I remember that his main struggle was with the temptation to do nothing but read to the utter neglect of penmanship, arithmetic, and geography. Even this taste, however, turned to his advantage, for he was not long in discovering that history which wears so solemn and forbidding a face upon the first acquaintance is in reality full of interest, action, stirring, and dramatic adventure; and gave himself up to that variety of reading thenceforward with a quiet conscience, although, indeed Plutarch and Gibbon soon lost whatever charm of novelty they had for him; he was obliged to go over his books more than once, not being able to buy many. These solid works

recalled to his mind for years thereafter not alone the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome, but the companionable odor of hay and harness-oil from the loft adjoining, and the horses stamping beneath him.

The young man was right in his estimate of Mrs. Ducey's opinions, as he found out shortly after that interview with her uncle. For, being engaged in cutting the grass one afternoon, and pausing to whet his scythe, the gate clicked, and as he looked that way he beheld Mrs. Ducey entering and coming towards him with her usual brisk and alert bearing, beginning to speak — as was her habit — before she was well within hearing. She had been making visits, I dare say; her fresh, fashionable skirts trailed crisply about her — *barège, popeline brochée, poult de soie* — how do I know what they were? These things are beyond the power of man. Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like a well-dressed lady of Nat Burke's young days; that respectable old Hebrew potentate would have made but a poor showing beside Mrs. Ducey, whose appearance unfailingly commanded all Nathan's admiration. She was so daintily rich and brilliant; rare flowers bloomed on her bonnets; she had all kinds of scarfs, veils, fringes, beads, and glittering trinkets. On this occasion she may have been wearing, for all I know, *une robe rédingote*, faced with *velours épinglè*, ornamented with *bouillonnées*, or *Brandebourgs*, or *cocardes en choux* — not that I have any idea what these decorations were. Heaven forbid! The above morsel of description had come under Nat's eye in the back of an odd number of *The Lady's World of Fashion*, with a group of simpering, delicately tinted sylphs on the opposite page in illustration, and being in a tongue not understanded of the people had puzzled him not a little. There has always been something very imposing to Mr. Burke in the spectacle of lovely woman thus attired; he stands tongue-tied in the Presence. And so he stood now, until Mrs. Ducey, with a young lady equally notable of aspect floating in her wake, had reached him.

"Nathan, I want you to be careful when you cut around the flower-beds. You oughtn't to have begun when I wasn't here to tell you — I've *told* you that before. Mr. Ducey doesn't like for you to disobey me, Nathan; I'm surprised at you —"

"Mrs. Marsh has been watching me — she's up yonder on the porch," said Nat, indicating the elder lady, who, in fact, had been superintending him vigilantly all afternoon. "I guess I couldn't go very far wrong with your mother looking on, Mrs. Ducey," said Nat, soberly.

"H'm! Mr. Ducey would be very angry if he knew you had disobeyed me, Nathan; you're not to do it again. Is that your coat on the bush? Don't hang it on that syringa; it will break it down, it's so heavy — and with that great big book in the pocket, too. Lay it on the ground somewhere. Is that one of your books, Nathan? What do you want with it?"

"I want it to read, ma'am," said Nat, feeling, to his vexation, the blood rise in his face. "She oughtn't to talk to me that way before — before that young lady — before *people*," he thought.

"Oh, yes, I remember now, I heard about your reading. Now don't begin and neglect your work, just to read, Nathan. And don't read that way in your room at night. I'm afraid you'll set the stable on fire with your candle —"

"I haven't set it on fire with the lantern yet," Nat reminded her.

"You mustn't answer me back, Nathan," said Mrs. Ducey, very gently and kindly; "that isn't *nice*, you know. You'll be sure to go to sleep and set the stable on fire with your candle — it's very dangerous — of course you're just a young boy and you don't think of these things. You can take your book and go somewhere on Sundays when we aren't driving out, or when you have a holiday, but you mustn't dawdle around reading other times. Mr. Ducey wouldn't like it. I'm coming, Ma, I'm coming. I've got Mary with me, she's going to stay to tea. What? Why, I said *Mary — Mary Sharpless*, you know. I made her come home with me. Now mind what I said, Nathan. Mr. Ducey wouldn't like it if he knew you had been idle. Come along, Mary."

She was halfway to the porch already with the words, moving with her swift step that was yet so sure and graceful, like all her motions; nobody ever saw Mrs. Ducey stumble. Her clear incisive voice carried to the house and street with equal distinctness, and it seemed to Nathan as if the entire

neighborhood were being advertised of the fact that Ducey's hired man was loafing away his time. It was not true, and the young fellow's face burned under his tan. He turned his eyes from Mrs. Ducey's retreating back, and to his surprise encountered those of her visitor fixed on him. The young lady had not moved to follow her hostess; she was a young lady of a charming, straight, light, and slender figure; her black hair was modishly arranged in complicated loops and braids, smooth and glossy, as if carved in jet; those eyes which Nat looked down into were not black, however, but very large, soft, and gray, oddly encircled by long heavy black lashes. She smiled up at him to his thrilled bewilderment.

"Weren't you whetting your scythe just now?" (This was the profoundly original remark she addressed to him.) "I think that's the most *skilful* thing — I often wonder how men do it. You move the whetstone so *quick!*"

"It's — it's — it ain't hard — it's easy when you know how," stammered Nathan. He rested one hand on the top of the blade and manœuvred the stone with the other in a burst of lightning speed. Miss Mary Sharpless stood in rapt admiration.

"Let me try," she said enthusiastically, seizing the tool with her small, elegant hands. Nat was still holding it, but she let it go promptly with a little cry. "Oh, *mercy*, isn't it heavy? However can you hold it? How strong you must be!"

"This scythe? Why, it's *light*," said the boy, handling it with elaborate ease.

"Mary, Mary, aren't you coming? Ma wants to see you," Mrs. Ducey called from the porch, and Miss Sharpless gave Nat another glance out of her odd and beautiful eyes, and walked away.

Nathan so far obeyed Mrs. Ducey's injunctions as to neglect Webster and fractions for that one night at any rate; and instead of applying himself, as heretofore, to those musty pursuits he mooned about the remote corners of the yard with a pipe, gradually edging nearer the house from a point whence his tobacco-smoke would drift off down the wind, such was the craft which he had suddenly developed. He saw Mr. Ducey escorting the guest back to her home at an

appropriate hour; and being by this time near enough to hear the two other ladies on the porch, got what he deserved, the usual listeners' wage.

"Well, Ma, Will can talk all he pleases, *I* don't want any literary chore-boys. Of course it's all right for them to know how to read and write — everybody ought to know how to do that. But I think it's perfectly absurd — all this talk about uplifting and educating that class. They aren't fitted for it, and you just unfit them for their own people and don't make them good enough for ours. It fills their heads full of *ideas*, and makes them unhappy and useless. Why, just look at the darkies at home; they can't even read and write, and they're as happy as the day is long — that just *shows*. I believe in people staying where the Lord put them to begin with, and not trying to be what He never meant them to be. It's a great pity Nathan's got this crazy notion of reading; he'll get to be perfectly worthless before long."

Young Burke, in the darkness, uttered a distressingly profane ejaculation; it was the strongest in his vocabulary, and alas! I fear poor Nat's boyish ears had heard much more than was good for them in those honest, hearty, coarse old days. Mrs. Ducey would have run away screaming with her hands to her face, she would have wildly refused to have him around another minute, if she could have seen and heard her hired man at this juncture. *Worthless!* The words were not intended for his ears, but even if Mrs. Ducey had known he was within hearing, it is to be doubted whether she would have moderated her voice. Come away, my friends, the young gentleman is not a handsome object as he stands there grinding his teeth and cursing in the dark. Let us leave him to his frightful schemes of giving notice the very next day, of getting another job at the foundry, on an Allegheny freight-wagon, a coach, a canal-boat, anything where people will treat him like a *man*. By to-morrow morning he will have come out of his temper, he will think of it with ironic mirth. And when Nora whirls out of the dining-room, weeping tears of rage all over the platter of breakfast-bacon and vowing she won't stay here and be talked to like that, *there*, Nathan will endeavor to soothe her with words of reason. For ourselves, had we not better

join Mrs. Marsh and Mrs. Ducey on the porch? We may be just in time to hear another speech which Nat caught as he was striding away in a fume to his poor defamed books; it brought him up short, angry as he was.

"Mary Sharpless?" said Mrs. Ducey; and in answer to something inaudible from her mother, "Oh, yes, she hasn't changed a bit, and never will, if she lives to be a hundred. Didn't you see her actually making eyes at Nathan this afternoon? Mary can't help it; she just can't pass by anything in trousers."

CHAPTER VII

In which is continued the Chronicle of Small Beer

During Mr. Burke's term of office the Ducey house perpetually overflowed with visitors; they came from New Orleans, from Natchez, from a dozen cities and plantations scattered up and down the Southern States. These troops of guests generally arrived to spend the summer months; in the evenings the Ducey front-steps bloomed with lovely young ladies in flowing white skirts and twinkling necklaces, with dazzling white arms and the most bewitching little feet in tiny satin slippers. All the young men in town would congregate there; there was a prodigious consumption of lemonade and cakes and ices; the elegant square rosewood piano in the parlor would be opened, and two or three of the nymphs would execute thereon various tinkling and tripping pieces of music entitled "Showers of Pearls," "Roses and Dewdrops," and so on. Some of them could sing, "Isle of Beauty, fare thee well," "Oh, why hast thou taught me to love thee?" "True love can ne'er forget," and other of the sentimental ballads then in vogue. They were so sentimental that the Duceys' hired man invariably beat a retreat whenever he chanced to stray within the zone of melody; he had not much ear for music, as has been hinted, and all this talk about breaking hearts and gushing tears and golden lutes and sighs and smiles and kisses struck him as lackadaisical bosh; it made him ashamed — by Heavens, it makes him ashamed now! Even the picture which he sometimes glimpsed through the open windows of — shall we say? — Miss Sharpless, a wreath of pale artificial flowers drooping delicately among her black braids and a low-necked, wide-spreading filmy muslin encompassing her trim figure, with her hands scampering up and down the keys in the accompaniment of another similarly attired virgin — even this tableau, which would have moved him ordinarily with an æsthetic delight, could not reconcile him to the

melancholy foolishness of those songs. He did not see Mary thus occupied very often; she came to the house infrequently, and Nat, with a dumb amazement, overheard Mrs. Ducey explaining to some intimate female caller that Mary Sharpless was really a little too old for *these* girls. The young men did not seem to think so, but young men are notoriously bad judges. There was never wanting one of them to bring her to the house of an evening, to take her home, to hang over the piano while she performed astounding trills and variations on that reliable instrument. These young bucks were elaborately brushed, scented, and oiled; each one wore a curling lock of hair disposed carefully in the middle of his forehead, and the rest of it waving down over his high velvet coat-collar, glossy, ambrosial! A single jewelled button glimmered from the midst of his shirt-front; he had glorious plaided, brocaded, ringèd, stripèd, and streakèd waistcoats of sumptuous materials, seal-rings to decorate his fingers, slender, natty rattan canes, kid gloves of tender lavender and canary hues. Where are they gone, birds of bright plumage? *Meminisse juvabit!* Nathan Burke — who had neither part nor lot with them — cannot but recall them with tenderness. He used to look on from afar without envy; he enjoyed the double privilege of a certain intimacy with these gilded youths among the warehouses and offices down town, where their appearance was by no means so gilded, and of beholding the angels of the piazza and drawing-room at tolerably close range in the earlier hours of the day, when, to tell the truth, their attire and manners were not always nearly so angelic.

Besides these, there were whole flocks of chirruping youngsters; Nat hardly knew them apart, although he was constantly being called upon to take them out riding by the phaeton-load at once in bouquets of babies, to separate the little boys when they fought, to rescue the little girls from the advances of inquiring ganders and turkey-gobblers. Their mothers were forever running with screams to pluck them out of the hot sunshine like brands from the burning; if Nathan had carried out all the anxious orders he received to keep them away from the stable, the beehives, the well, the grindstone, he would have done nothing else. But in fact he never meddled with them unless he saw that they

had ventured into some position of real risk, and then they obeyed him with signal alacrity. "We were all afraid of you, Nat," one of them told him long afterwards; "we were afraid of you, you were so long and lean and quick, you had such a thin, hook nose and such sharp blue eyes. I saw you shoot a hawk once that had swooped down and snatched up a chicken. You did it with your rifle, and the hawk fell down dead in the middle of the yard, shot through its murderous hawk heart, and the hen wasn't hurt after all. You skinned the hawk and nailed the skin up, spread eagle fashion on the barn-door, do you remember? Afterwards we children used to pretend that you came down every night and wrapped up in the skin and feathers and went sailing — sailing — through the sky like a hawk yourself. Some of us half believed it. The darky nurses at home had filled us full of spooks and bogies and savage fancies. How long were you here? A year? Two years? I remember when we came back one summer there was another hired man, and you were gone and the hawkskin, too. Of course you had taken it with you — were-wolf!"

Nathan used to hear the maidservants making loud moan about the extra work Mrs. Ducey's "company" entailed; but dissatisfaction in that quarter was so common as to be scarcely noticeable. His own duties were not much heavier; the children minded him, and he looked upon them with much the same tolerance as upon the household pets, Francie's kittens, or George's rabbits. It is in the nature of small boys to follow and ape a big boy, so that when the little fellows besieged him with entreaties to let them "hitch up" or turn the grindstone, to take them swimming, take them fishing, take them hunting, Nat, sympathizing with the universal boyish desires, sometimes complied — when the mothers would hear of it. Once, towards the close of his second year with the Duceys, he even took Georgie on a shooting expedition, after that young gentleman had pestered his parents, or rather his mother, into giving consent — no one thought of asking Nathan's. To do him justice it was not often that George sought the hired man's society, being, it is more than likely, in the frame of mind of Doctor Fell's patient who did not fancy that eminent practitioner: the reason why he could not tell, but 'twas a thing he knew

full well. George was older than most of the other children whom he played with or teased or bullied, proceedings not unusual among boys, but he had few friends of his own age. Francie would come home from school with a whole battalion of pantaletted and leghorn-bonneted little dames like herself; they had tea-parties under the bushes and played house in the harness-room, when Nathan would let them. George had no companions; the child was sickly, he could not or would not join in the other boys' games and enterprises. His mother lauded his obedience; but Nathan had a fancy that George singularly lacked the spirit of adventure. It was impossible to imagine him sneaking off to go in swimming or skating, or playing hookey for the sake of any kind of sport. These pursuits are very questionable; I do not defend them; I agree entirely with the outraged ladies who will clap the book to at this point, loudly denouncing its author for a corrupt old villain, putting *ideas* into children's heads. I repeat, these crimes cannot be too severely condemned — but is there a boy on this turning globe who has not committed them? Georgie was an exemplary character; he would never rob an orchard or a melon patch in the world; he would share the spoil, but that he should take the risk was inconceivable. He liked very much to be dressed in his little fine white ruffled cambric shirt and linen trousers, which he always kept beautifully clean, and his cap with the shining patent-leather peak; and thus costumed to sit on the front seat of the carriage when Mrs. Ducey went out driving. He did not want to drive himself, he was a little afraid when the horses shied or pranced; but he took undisguised pleasure in instructing Nathan in the art and ordering him about in his mother's presence; he never attempted it elsewhere. It was a long while before he could ride his pony without an evident tremor; but the little animal being well-broken and submissive, Georgie finally overcame his fears, and in time learned to manage it with some degree of skill. He used to canter back and forth before his mother and as large an audience as could be gathered on the front porch, sitting up very straight, with his cap cocked ever so slightly over one eye, and his whip and elbows in a rakish, jaunty, dare-devil attitude, which the ladies greatly admired. "Isn't it wonderful how Georgie rides?"

Mrs. Ducey would remark to them; "it's perfectly natural to him — he just picked it right up. He doesn't know what fear is. I think I never saw so perfect a *seat* on a horse, did you? And you ought to see how he takes care of his 'horse,' as he calls it. Feeds it and grooms it himself, and beds it down and washes its back — simply wonderful for a young boy. They aren't generally so patient and kind to animals, you know." Which last was entirely true and a trait of the boy's character as out of the ordinary as some of his other traits.

Mrs. Ducey, once having acquiesced in the hunting plan, became more enthusiastic than the boy himself. She sat up till all hours of the night working over a little shooting-jacket for him; there was a tremendous outlay for boots, game-bags, ammunition — one would have thought that Georgie, who had never fired a gun in his life, nor seen a live quail, and who knew no more about the backwoods than he did about logarithms, was going to slay his thousands, as, I dare say, his proud and devoted mother imagined he would. She made the lad's father buy him a gun, notwithstanding the fact that one quite good enough for the purpose could have been borrowed in fifty houses of the town, for almost everybody owned some sort of firearms in those days. It was a beautiful double-barrelled English fowling-piece, a Manton, that Mr. Ducey bought, and Nat eyed it longingly when it came home in the handsome leather case provided for it. Georgie enjoyed flourishing the weapon in and out of this case and marching with it in a martial pose on his shoulder much more than he did the practical details of its handling. He looked on indifferently when Nathan showed him how to clean and load it, and when the latter proposed to set up a target in an open field near Willson's Grove and give him a little practice, shrank visibly. Nat himself entertained no high-flown expectations of the delights of this trip. "If he don't shoot me or the dog or somebody's cow, we'll be lucky," he thought with humorous resignation; and exerted himself to prevent Mrs. Ducey from buying a thoroughbred pointer which she ardently desired to do as soon as she heard that a dog was more or less necessary. "Why, I know a young fellow that's got a yearling setter-pup that he'd be glad to have me take out and break for him,

Mrs. Ducey," argued Nathan; "don't you think it's better to let Georgie go out this once and see how he likes it, and if he *does* like it, time enough to buy a dog then." She finally yielded, not to Nat's persuasions — indeed, no! — but upon finding that Georgie also did not warm to the project for some reason. He eagerly assented to everything Nathan said, followed him about, and was laboriously attentive to him these days.

"Ain't you going to take any gun?" he asked, observing Nat's exceedingly simple preparations; "you can't use mine, you know. That is, I'll let you have it once in a while, but you must mind and be careful with it. You ought to take your own gun — why don't you?"

"It's no good to shoot quail with," Nathan explained to him. "I'll borrow one of Jake Darnell's, I guess — he's got two or three. No use lugging mine fifteen miles out in the country; there aren't any more deer around there to speak of. It's been clean hunted out."

"What's the matter with your gun that you can't shoot quail with it?" demanded Georgie, suspiciously. "I ain't going to let you have mine, anyhow. Mine cost two hundred and twenty-five dollars. How much did yours cost?"

"Nothing, I guess. It's a musket. Belonged to my father. He got it off a British soldier up North — at the fight at Fort Meigs. Then he had the barrel rifled out. It's a pretty fair gun," said Nat, repeating what Darnell had told him, for he could not remember his father. He glanced out at the misty November sky, thinking how well the scent must lie this weather. The prospect of a day in the open, the river, the wet leaves underfoot, the corn-shocks all arow, the sudden whirr and uprush of the birds, was beginning to exhilarate him, spite of his native soberness, and the drawback of Georgie's company. They started out together one foggy morning not long afterwards, Mrs. Ducey pursuing the spring-wagon to the road with injunctions not to let Georgie go out in the midday sun which was never good for him, not to let him walk in the damp woods under the trees ("You can shoot just as well from the road, you know, Nathan."), not to allow him to go near any poison-ivy, or climb any fences, or get burrs in his clothes, or wet his feet. Nat bore these responsibilities cheerfully

enough; as it happened he had other and more important matters on his mind.

"You've got to be quick, but you musn't get into a hurry," he counselled the excited boy. "You're not holding your gun right — let me show you — see, this way. And set it down — set it down when you go to get out of the wagon or into it or to get over a wall or anything — you know, the trigger might catch in something. Look out — that's not a quail up there, Georgie; they don't roost high, you know; that's nothing but a flicker, let it alone, they aren't any good to eat. Well, if you *will* —" he stood aside resignedly, while Georgie drew a bead on the flicker, missed it by a generous distance, and staggered back with the recoil of the gun. He was not at all strong.

"You hadn't any business to talk to me while I was aiming," he said angrily, turning on his companion. "I don't believe you know anything about hunting — the way to hunt is to keep quiet — that's the way to hunt. You just keep still the next time. It's all your fault — I'd have had him if you hadn't been making such a noise. He flew away just as I shot — you scared him away. And then talking that way you kept me from aiming. What's the dog running 'round and whining that way for?"

"He's looking for the bird; he don't know why, but he somehow expects something to fall — they all do that way. He's just a young dog, you know, but that's his nature; he can't help it. I'm afraid you can't make him keep quiet," said Nat, trying not to smile, not altogether successfully, for George eyed him with resentment.

"Here, load the gun," he commanded, thrusting it towards the other — and then shrank back in obvious fright. "What are you looking that way for? I haven't done anything." Nathan had been on the point of telling the young gentleman to attend to his gun himself; but bethinking him that it would be a pity for their several careers to be cut short by the explosion or other misbehavior of the weapon, he gravely took and loaded it, returning it to its owner with further advice.

"You'll have to allow for the barrel jerking up on you a little when you fire," he said, feeling an inexplicable rush of

pity for the other's trembling hands, his weak body, his hysterical impatience; "and when you're sighting on just one bird, you know — because they don't always get up in a covey — when you're sighting on just one bird — " went on Nathan, trying to explain the unexplainable — "remember you must kind of drop the shot a little — just a *little* ahead of him, because he'll be there by the time you've fired, see?"

Like most amateur teachers, he wanted to teach too much at one lesson, with the usual result that he taught nothing at all. Nathan could not remember the time when he had not known how to handle a gun; he was confused himself at finding how difficult it was to impart what seemed to him so essentially simple a thing; and his well-meant efforts served only to fret and perplex his poor little pupil. The first time the birds got up with the furious loud battling of wings which accompanies their rise, Georgie, although the dog had pointed in a tense silence with quivering muscles for fully half a minute, was so startled that he stood motionless, staring; and Nat, unable to bear the spectacle of so good a chance going to waste, snatched the gun from him, and succeeded in winging one of the quail — a proceeding which George very properly resented and for which Nathan apologized with contrition. "I — I just couldn't help it — they were all getting away," he explained humbly; "I won't do that again, George. Here, let me load again for you. I'll give it back to you, I will — honor bright. I'll borrow Jake's gun for myself when we get to the cabin." Georgie forgave him; the boy was always ready enough to make up and be friends; there was no trace of vindictiveness in his disposition. He was filled with delight at the way the young setter plunged among the bushes and brought out the bird, under Nathan's instructions, panting and grinning and wagging his plumed tail, a happy dog. Yet he withdrew in a kind of horrified distaste from the warm bleeding body of the quail. "It smells — I — I don't like to touch it — I won't touch it," he gasped, quite pale and shuddering; and Nathan, who suffered no humane scruples at shooting a quail, dropped it into the bag, wondering.

They fell in with Darnell towards noon, a mile or so from his home, and walked on together, Georgie sidling close to

Nat, silent for once and oddly overawed by the backwoodsman's appearance. Jake was sober, to Burke's relief; he came upon them from behind, noiseless as an Indian, with his ragged old pouch stuffed with game already. "'Bout four dozen, I reckon," he said in answer to Nat's question; "thick as hair on a dog's back, ain't they? Ye can't hardly fire at one without hittin' twenty. All ye got to do is jest pint yer gun an' let her go — c'ld do it with yer eyes shet, 'most. Still, I dunno — game ain't as plenty as it useter be. I wouldn't wonder if I'd hev' to be movin' on one o' these days. It's gittin' too crowded up 'roun' here." As long as Nathan knew Darnell this had always been his plaint; he had been moving on for fifteen years, and the young man listened with a smile. "They say it's kinder more roomy-like in th' Illinois," said Jake. "I might try it out there, 'twan't fer Nance. It's hard to move th' wimmenfolks, ye know. Hey? Why, sartain ye kin hev' it, sartain. Yeh kin take this one, er come on up to th' cabin an' git that there little duck-gun ye useter be so fond of, Nat. That's a first-rate gun th' little feller's got, ain't it? Criminy, that there's a good gun! Is that Ducey's boy?"

He bent upon Georgie a glance so abrupt and keen the boy trembled before it. In fact, old Jake Darnell in his tawney butternut-dyed clothes, his moccasins, and coonskin cap, with his leathery face wrinkled like a boot-leg, and his quick eyes bright and unwinking as a snake's, however homely and natural he seemed to Nathan, must have been a fearsome figure to the little town-bred child. I do not know how old Jake was at this time; he looked anywhere between fifty and a hundred. He once said, in speaking of Boone, that he had been "jest a young feller startin' out," when he first met that famous scout and pathfinder. "Yer father was younger'n me, Nat," he said; "but we was together a good deal. I knowed yer maw's folks, too. I met up with yer gran'paw Granger 'long back when he first come to this country; I disremember th' year, but 'twas before th' war. Yer gran'paw come fer ter take up some land, but I heern afterwards he died 'fore he ever got ter do it — died uv th' fever over ter Muskingum County somewheres. Ol' woman Darce she kin remember him too; I reckon she come here 'bout th' same time. Queer how folks kinder float erroun'

an' erroun' an' bimeby they jest float up inter a corner like a chip in th' riffle an' stay thar, an' don't never float any more. When I come back from th' war, I got married after er while, an' yer paw he got married, an' that nachelly separates folks — men, ye know. I didn't see him agin till both our wives was dead. I tuk up some land an' settled here th' year o' th' big squirrel-hunt. You was borned that year, wan't ye? First uv th' year, seems like I kin remember. I'd a tuk keer uv ye, an' glad to, Nat, when John died, hadn't 'a' been fer 'Liph steppin' in first." "You did take care of me," Nathan said. He knew this was no idle talk; the older man was fond of him perhaps as much for the sake of remembered days and that ancient companionship with his father as for Nat's own. Nobody would have guessed from their greeting that any warm friendship existed between them, but neither was of a demonstrative nature. The last time he had seen Darnell, Nathan had found him wofully drunk in the gutter of a Scioto street slum and brought him by stealth to his room and got him sobered after a few hours, blessing his stars the while that Jake's sprees never took a noisy or violent turn. Mrs. Ducey would have had just cause for complaint had she known of it, yet I hardly see how Nat could have let his poor old companion lie in the open road. He wondered at the time why Nance was not at hand to keep her father straight, as had been her intention.

The girl's face brightened unaffectedly when she saw the visitor; she ran out to meet them, her red calico gown flapping, her black hair striving with the wind. "Lord, Nat, but I'm glad to see ye — it's a good while — you've growed, ain't you? You look a sight older. Is that Mrs. Ducey's little boy? How's yer ma, sonny?" she asked eagerly.

"You haven't been in town once, Nance," said Nathan, gazing in open admiration. "Why not? I thought you said you were going to?"

"Why, it jest happened that way. I — I haven' t got anything fitten to wear 'n' that's th' truth," she said, giving this feminine reason with a half-laugh as she glanced down, with no great concern, however, at her not very voluminous skirts. "I 'low people would think 'twas a Injun if they saw me comin'," she stated cheerfully.

"Pretty good-looking Indian, Nance," Nat told her

honestly. She colored, eying him with a little resentment.

"Aw, quit, Nat Burke, you want to be smart, I guess — gittin' citified, ain't ye? Say, I got somethin' fer yer ma, little boy. What's yer name? Georgie? Speak up, don't be so skeered. I was layin' off to give it to her myself, but mebbe you'd better take it. Wait a minute." She dashed into the house, and Nathan looked after her in wonder; yet it is likely the two years had wrought less change in Nance than in himself. Thus had she always looked and acted, so free, so brilliant, and so wild. He told himself that he had forgot how pretty Nance was; but it seemed as if she and the bland goddesses of Mrs. Ducey's front porch could hardly be creatures of the same planet. Nance bloomed in her wilderness with a savage integrity of beauty; she was aloof as a Diana, no more moving the senses than a shaft of flame, bright and leaping.

"I don't let her go to town, Nat," said Darnell, meeting the other's eye. A sudden extraordinary sort of ferocity appeared in his expression; he struck the butt of his gun heavily on the ground. "I ain't goin' ter let her go in town, no matter what you say," he repeated vehemently as if Nathan had contradicted him. "She — she ain't got no mother, 'n' Lord knows that's hard enough on a girl, 'n' I ain't much of a father — oh, I know that! I won't let her go nor I won't take her neither. She — she's too pretty, an' she ain't got nobody to look after her like she'd orter be looked after, 'cep'n me — an' what do I 'mount to? 'F anything was to happen to me, I always 'lowed you'd kinder take keer of Nance, Nathan — not that you've any call to, but —"

"Why, of course I would, but there isn't anything going to happen to you," Nathan answered him, surprised at this emotional outburst; and Nance came radiantly back, bearing a large bundle.

"It's fur — squirrels' pelts, fer a muff an' a — a — one of them things ladies wear 'roun' their necks," she said, depositing it in Georgie's unwilling hands; "I dressed 'em myself. They're prime skins — ain't they, Papa? Jest feel of 'em, Nat, jest prod yer finger down in that fur — ain't that thick an' silky, though?"

"She was plumb sot on it," said her father, indulgently; "durned if I didn't shoot thirty squirrel fer one that she'd pick out."

"Yer ma'll look pretty in 'em, won't she?" said Nance to the boy; "you've got a pretty ma, ain't you? Pretty as a picture. They ain't nothin' too good fer *her*, I guess."

"Ma's got *elegant* things, I don't believe she'll care about these," said Georgie, handling the pelts disdainfully; "my mother's furs cost a lot. I guess you've never seen anything *nice*, have you?"

Georgie pursued the chase with a luck so indifferent that perhaps it was not surprising he should tire before long, and his enthusiasm die. Perseverance, which seems to vary with the individual all the way from an interested industry to resolute and purely selfish ambition was not one of Georgie's qualities in any of its forms. Nathan knew that; but what he could not understand and found difficult to support was the perversity of the boy's idleness. He loitered on the way, he threw stones at the most promising coverts, he called, he whistled, he let off his gun at nothing, apparently from a simple enjoyment of noise, to the distraction of the setter who was a serious animal intent on the affairs of sport. Nathan, who, supplied with Darnell's gun, was having a day of sober enjoyment among the birds, felt himself for once utterly at a loss in his irritation and helplessness. Georgie was an unspeakable annoyance, but he did not dare to leave him alone; and after the first failures it was impossible to arouse the boy to further attempts. He wanted to climb trees, to collect nuts, to wade in the Scioto, to do anything on earth but shoot quail. And it was only when Nat announced that the time and spot were reached for camping that Georgie displayed any interest in his movements. Then, to Burke's unbounded astonishment, George threw himself into the housewifely duties of making a fire and getting the noonday meal with an unbelievable zest and handiness. He gathered sticks and dry leaves, fetched water, unpacked their cups and platters, watched over the roasting of their potatoes in the hot ashes, the boiling of their coffee, amiable, tireless, ready, neat, helpful! "Beats me!" said Nat to himself, lost in wonder; and it occurred to him for

the first time to speculate as to what sort of man George Ducey would grow up to be. He was approaching fifteen already and was to be sent to Miami University next year. What would Nat Burke have given for such a chance?

He drew a short sigh as he fell to planning out his own future in view of certain impending changes. No college course figured therein; Nat, in the wisdom and gravity of his eighteen-year judgment, considered himself too old now to profit by the study of the classics and the higher branches of learning. I believe, in reality, the scholastic career and aims had no attractions for him; what he dimly sought was a life of larger and more vigorous action. He looked around him at the woodland landscape and marvelled in his soul that he had ever been able to endure its serene, dispassionate, contented calm. It was not that life was so easy there; nowhere in the world do we get something for nothing, and a man must do his best and work his hardest for any kind of prize, be it at husbandry or what you will. But amongst these hard-faring settlers it would seem as if the end of all achievement were merely to make a living; and that of itself, Nathan knew in his heart, would never appease him now. He remembered that ridiculous old dam of Pascoe's with a grin; the thing was so emblematic of the pioneer spirit, rough-and-ready, conquering and careless. The dam served — what more would you have? Indeed he could hardly answer that question to his own satisfaction; throughout the day the young man had been conscious of some indefinable change in himself, since all else was the same. He thought with a strange pang of regret that Mrs. Williams had been right; he could never come back here now. He had been back only once in all this while. The familiar air was good; the sound of the river was good; the fields of stubble, the autumn woods, all as he had pictured them; the place had been home to him, but, with another pang, he realized that it would never be so again. He had left there with no higher aim than to become a shining light among hired men — what were his ambitions now? The young fellow blushed and laughed at his own exalted dreams, forgetting to answer the boy at his side as they drove along.

They stopped at the Williams cabin towards mid-afternoon, having by this time, partly on foot, partly in the spring-

wagon, fetched a compass about all the fields and deadenings where Nat had been used to hunt in the old days — the days which seemed so old, yet were not such a great while behind him after all. It went to his heart to find himself received almost as a stranger. Mrs. Williams wiped her hands on her dingy gown before shaking his — those knotty hands of hers, if the truth were told, had administered more than one much-needed correction to Nat Burke when he was about the age of little Johnny or Abe over there; he thought this formality sat ill on them now. The younger children came and looked at him and at Georgie, — who was highly gratified at this tribute and assumed a wonderfully important and dignified air, — shy and silent, holding to their mother's skirts. There was a new baby. The only natural figure in the company was that of old woman Darce, still smoking her everlasting pipe like an animated mummy by the hearth, whence she appeared never to have moved since Nathan's departure, not at all concerned in his comings or goings and having to have everything screamed at her twice or thrice before she could catch the meaning.

"It's Nathan, Maw, Nathan Burke's come back," Mrs. Williams shouted in her ear.

"Huh? Nat's come back? Did he git th' grist?" asked the old woman; and Nat had to laugh, recalling the times when perched on old Baldy's back, a position somewhat comparable to sitting on a chain of door-knobs, with the sack of corn balanced before him, he had jogged to mill at Franklinton, ten miles there and back.

"She don't hardly take notice of anythin' nowadays, Nat; I reckon she's fergot you been away," said Mrs. Williams, apologetically.

"No, I ain't fergot it, 'n' ye don't need to holler so, Lindy; I kin hear ye," said her mother, testily, with the inconvenient alertness of deaf old age. But she added the next moment: "Ef he's brung th' grist, you tell him to come here, 'n' I've got a piece o' slippery-ellum bark fer him. He's a good, stiddy boy, Nat is."

Nathan went up to her to receive this reward of merit in amused tolerance, and the old woman removed her pipe, studying him with her dim old eyes wherein one might discern a kind of flickering interest, although her mask-like face

showed no change of expression, perhaps was incapable of any.

"Ye're growin'," she commented; "here, coopee down so's I kin git a look at yeh. I wanter see ef yeh favor yer maw er paw." And, as the young man obediently squatted down at her knees, she thrust forward her face and long, skinny neck into a not too agreeable proximity, taking census of his features. Mrs. Williams looked on impatiently, the children giggled together, George idled about the room, with critical glances.

"Huh, Granger cl'ar through," announced Mrs. Darce, at length, seeming to take considerable satisfaction in this conclusion; Nathan was rising when she arrested him with another question: "What color's yer hair, Nat? I cain't see it — this light's dretful pore. Nathan Granger, his hair was jest turnin' white, but it hed been light. Ye're light-complected, ain't yeh?"

"Kind of middling, I guess," shouted Burke, grinning around at Mrs. Williams.

"You'd be light enough, ef 'twasn't fer bein' tanned up so," remarked the latter. "Yes, Maw, he's kinder light," she screamed, and to Burke in an aside: "Land! Ain't it funny th' notions ol' people gits? Who d'ye s'pose Nathan Granger was? I never heern o' *him* before. Was that there Granger man kin to Nat, Maw?" she screamed again.

"Hey?"

"Who *was* Nathan Granger?" bellowed Burke, beginning to be interested in his family-tree. "Was he one of my mother's people?"

"Hey? Yes. Oh, my lordy, yes. It's him yer named fer — yer maw wanted it thet way. She said so before she died, pore little thing. He was her paw. Kinder funny how ye favor him, Nat; he warn't over 'n' above good-lookin', jes' so-so. Ain't I ever tol' yeh 'bout him? I knowed him right well. He was a Britisher, ye know. Come from Canady, time o' th' Revolution. I met up with him 'long back when we first come here.[1] That was before I was married ter Lindy's paw, Ben Darce; 'twas when my first man was alive — before th' Injuns got him. Ain't I ever tol' you 'bout *that?*"

[1] Probably about 1792. — GENERAL BURKE'S NOTE.

"No, you never told me. I'd like to hear about Gran—" Nathan was beginning, but Mrs. Williams interrupted him with a warning gesture.

"Fer th' land's sake, Nat, don't git her started on them ol' times," she whispered energetically; "it'll wear ye plumb out, 'n' 'sides that it gits th' pore ol' woman all flustered up 'n' excited-like, 'n' I dunno ez it's right ter let her talk 'bout 'em. Yeh know her first husband was kilt by th' Injuns over ter Wheeling airly days — they was all shet up in th' blockhouse, 'cep'n him. He couldn't git in somehow, 'n' she saw them red devils do it. I've knowed her git ter cryin' 'n' screamin' like she was crazy tellin' 'bout it. Don't you riccollect?"

Nat did remember, and was quick enough to direct the talk elsewhere — though, to be sure, old woman Darce appeared already to have forgot his presence, and sat staring and smoking and working her jaws in her corner as usual. He could ask Darnell some time about this Britisher Nathan Granger, he thought; and speedily forgot the whole occurrence, listening to the news of the country-side, and preparing to startle Mrs. Williams with some news of his own. "Did ye hear 'bout Pascoe, Nat? He's going ter hev' er law-suit. I don't know's I've got th' straight of it, but seems they was a piece of land Pascoe was going to sell fer a man up to Delaware — man by th' name of Marshall. 'Twas that piece of river-bottom next to Pinney's — *you* know — 'n' Pascoe he 'lowed he could talk Pinney inter buyin' it, 'n' then Pascoe'd git a — a c'mmission, I b'lieve they call it. But he didn't — Pinney acted so kinder offish. Pascoe said he jest give him up after a while, 'n' tried some other folks livin' over to Worthin'ton. 'N' then Marshall he died here last April 'n' th' first thing you know —"

I am afraid Mr. Burke hardly heard the tale of Pascoe's troubles, though he tried to listen and chided himself inwardly for his indifference. The young man's head was full of his own affairs; and he seized the first pause in Mrs. Williams's talk to announce with appropriate importance:—

"I'm going to make a change — perhaps I'd better tell you now before I forget it" — Forget it! Oh, Nathan! — "After the first of the year I won't be with Duceys any more — choring, you know."

"Won't? Why? Have they turned you off? You don't say! What fer? What you been doin'?"

"No, they haven't turned me off," said Nat, with some warmth. "But I'm going down to clerk at the store. One of their boys is leaving them, and old Mr. Marsh wants me to try it. He stopped me and talked to me about it the other day. He thinks I'd do all right — I know what some of the work is, being down there so much to get things. I know I can do it."

"Clerk, hey?" echoed Mrs. Williams, abstractedly. "You, Johnny, don't you go to foolin' with that there powder 'n' shot — make him quit it, Nathan. Clerkin' fer Mr. Marsh, did you say? I thought somehow 'twas Ducey's store. As I was tellin' ye, Pascoe he —"

Georgie and his tutor did not reach home until late that evening, driving along the unkempt roads under the solemn radiance of the Hunters' Moon, and Mrs. Ducey was much alarmed to see her boy asleep in the bottom of the wagon, covered with Nat's coat, and his head pillowed upon the roll of squirrels' pelts. She took his companion sharply to task for George's condition.

"Georgie was exhausted — perfectly *exhausted*," she declaimed afterwards; "it was very careless of you, Nathan, to let him wear himself out that way; you ought to have taken better care of him, you *know* he's not strong. He'll have to stay in bed for a day or two. I don't care if he does lose the time from school, he's as white as a sheet this morning. Sallie, take that custard and quince jelly and that piece of chocolate cake up to Mr. George, and I'll have you make him a little oyster stew after a while."

When her fears were quieted down enough for her to notice Nance's tribute, Mrs. Ducey was divided between wonder and perplexity — as was, perhaps, natural. Nat overheard her in council with the family: "Well, the furs are really *very fine*, if they are nothing but squirrel, as fine as I ever saw, but *did you ever?* What do you suppose possessed the girl? I don't believe I ever saw her in my life. William says I have at the store, but those country-women look exactly alike, all of them; I'm sure I wouldn't know her. I don't know what to do — don't you suppose I'd better send her

something? Oh, I know, I'll give her that green velvet dress, I can't wear it any more — you know that moss-green velvet with the gilt buttons. It's perfectly good still, except where I spilled the coffee over it, and just a little worn around the bottom, and she'll never notice things like that. She'll think it was that way from the beginning. I guess that's what I'd better do. Nathan could take it out to her some time when he has a day off."

Nathan scarcely knew why he shrunk at the plan; he could not tell any more than Mrs. Ducey what had possessed Nance; he could not have explained in words Mrs. Anne could understand that it had seemed to him there was a high feeling in this free and eager offering of the best Nance had, some spirit above bargaining or recompense. He hoped he would not have to carry out the green velvet dress; and in fact he never did, nor did Nance ever wear it. I remember to have seen Mrs. Ducey in a cloak lined with the fur every winter for twenty years thereafter; they were fine furs as she said and wore — eh, how much, how much they did outwear and outlast!

There were twenty odd quail in the bags, and Nathan was not surprised to hear within a day or two that Georgie had shot three-fourths of them. The information tickled him so that he would not have corrected it for worlds. "George would have shot them all if it hadn't been for me making such a noise," he said with gravity in answer to a shrewd question or two from Mr. Marsh — whereat the latter, who allowed himself a good deal of familiarity with the young man, slapped him on the shoulder and burst into a dislocating chuckle. Old George cherished no particular affection for his nephew — largely, I believe, because the boy was named after him. It's not an unusual prejudice; for I will say fairly I have yet to see the man who feels himself complimented by his namesakes!

CHAPTER VIII

In which Mr. Burke makes a New Start

Nat had been a good deal startled and pleased and flattered by old Marsh's offer; milking cows is an honorable occupation, but he liked to think that one man at least had observed in him the stuff for better things; it would be difficult to say at what time other ambitions began to take shape within him, but certainly he had not expected to remain a chore-boy all his life. Nobody knows what grandiose schemes and visions had possessed him; yet it is somewhat to his credit that, even at that age, Nathan recognized that the invariable prelude to success is a deal of hard work. He had no notion of shirking that part of Life's bargain, or of winning by a trick. He accepted the proposal as eagerly as was natural to his rather cautious and reserved temper, with no distrust of his own abilities, but with a sober anxiety to show his worthiness. So far, he believed, he had not failed to satisfy his employers; he would not fail of satisfying Mr. Marsh now — he never thought of the other member of the firm.

The truth is, Mr. William Ducey was notified of this arrangement in the bluntest possible manner, and with no pretence of consulting his convenience or preference, by George Marsh himself. It was not the first time something of the kind had taken place; the clerks came and went at Marsh's pleasure; lived, moved, and had their being under his eye. When Nathan had finished out his appointed days in the Ducey household, he was dismissed from the one position and welcomed into the other by William with as much of a flourish as if the exchange had not been, so far as Ducey himself was concerned, in a sense, compulsory. "I hope, Burke, you will acquit yourself as well in a fiduciary position as you have in — er — ah — " said William, rather at a loss for the proper term to apply to Nat's late cares,

and waving his hand toward the barnyard in delicate illustration; and Nathan thanked him, grinning faintly. If he had no especial admiration for Ducey, Nat at least knew him to be an honest and good-hearted man, who sincerely wished his ex-chore-boy well, perhaps even had some vague understanding of the latter's ambitions and applauded them. Not so Mrs. Ducey; if William was disposed to "crinkle down" in obedience to her uncle's dictum, Anne was not. She was too obstinate and high-spirited to be afraid of George Marsh or anybody; and did not hesitate to inform him, greatly to the old gentleman's amusement, that the transfer was the most tyrannical thing she had ever heard of, the most foolish, short-sighted, and inconsiderate. Nathan was astonished to find himself numbered with those blessings which brighten as they take their flight! He was a fine chore-boy, the best chore-boy they had ever had, so faithful, so steady, so capable! It was a shame to stick him in a counting-room and try to make a clerk of him — well, we should *see!* In six months he would be glad to come back and go to making garden and driving the carriage again. Think what a good home and good wholesome food he had here; often and often she had taken a nice roast chicken wing or neck that had hardly been touched and sent it out to him from her own table — eh? No, he never seemed to eat it, to be sure; he didn't appreciate a little kindness like that the way a colored servant would; you know you couldn't expect it, the way he had been brought up out in the back woods.

"Well, I don't know," remarked old George, thoughtfully; "to my notion a chore-boy's a chore-boy, and a garbage-barrel's a garbage-barrel, and, by damn, I don't believe in mixing 'em up!"

"I don't think it's necessary for you to use that sort of language before me, Uncle George, and it certainly isn't *nice*," said Mrs. Ducey, with dignity. "I suppose you think *swearing* is one of the things it will be good for Nathan to learn. You will only be putting him in the way of temptation, giving him twice as much wages for work he won't be able to do; and then when he has to come down to choring again, he will be absolutely *spoiled* for it, and will be sure to go to the dogs right away. I'm surprised at Nathan —

I thought he'd have more *gratitude*, after all we've done for him — giving him all Will's old clothes and everything — and after all I've done myself. I've gone out and mixed a pitcher of hot flaxseed tea for him when he was sick with a cold — yes, and got medicine for him — Jayne's Vermifuge —"

"What!" yelled old George; "Jayne's *what?*"

"Vermifuge — for worms, you know — all young boys need it. He wouldn't take it, though I did my best to make him. He's a very stubborn disposition — really, Uncle George, when you laugh that way, I'm sometimes afraid you'll have a stroke."

Nat could not help overhearing these jeremiads; there never was any privacy for anybody, not excepting herself, where Mrs. Ducey was; she argued, scolded, lamented *coram publico*, not being able to conceive of any need for reticence especially where servants were concerned, and being in all things absolutely frank, literal, and direct. She said no more than was true of her kindnesses, which were as headlong and ill-judged as her unkindnesses, and moved Nathan equally with a species of helpless and tender amusement.

Of the other members of the family, Georgie took very little interest in the hired man's affairs; but Frances, upon hearing of the change, and beholding Nat's few belongings depart in a box and carpet-bag to the lodgings he had found in an exceedingly modest neighborhood at the other end of town, exhibited an emotion that alarmed and, to be truthful, annoyed this hero considerably. The little thing — Francie was about eleven at this time, but very short, dumpy, and homely — clung to him, weeping aloud. She unblushingly wound her arms around his neck and burrowed her head into his fine new black silk stock with the buckle at the back to which Nat had treated himself in honor of his emancipation; she shed bitter tears all over his clean collar and shirt-front. Nathan was going away and she refused to be comforted; you would have thought he was bound for the other side of the globe by all the tragic to-do she made.

"Why, gracious goodness, I'll be right down at the store every day of the world, Francie," said the young fellow, too soft-hearted to disengage himself forcibly, yet crimson

with a wretched embarrassment before the giggling maid-servants, and fervently wishing he could think of something to quiet her; "there's a new hired man coming to-morrow — he's coming from just the same place I did, and I've showed him how to do everything — and all about your swing and the playhouse and everything else," said Nat, wondering privately how long Joe Williams, who was an honest and well-meaning, but not overclever lad, would stick it out with Mrs. Ducey. "He'll be just the same as I am —"

"No, he won't — I h-hate him — I w-wish he'd go away — I w-want *you!*"

"Oh, now, you won't feel that way. You'll be all over that in a little," said Nat, removing a bunch of her curls from his mouth, and at his wits' end for words of comfort.

"Look here, I've got something of yours — I've got your quarter, don't you remember? You haven't asked me about that for a good while, have you? Look, here it is."

Fresh wails and sobs! "I w-want you to have it! I want you to k-keep it!"

"Why, no, you don't, Francie; that's your money, you know. You don't want it now, maybe, but you will some day."

"No, I won't, Nathan," said the child, lifting her poor little wet face to his. "I want you to *keep* it *forevernever*. Cross your heart and say you'll keep it."

And this sentimental rite being performed, Mrs. Ducey most opportunely happened along, attracted by the doleful uproar, and took Francie away with a prim and shocked expression. "The idea, Frances, a great big girl like you, aren't you ashamed of yourself? Hanging on to Nathan that way —" Her searching voice descended to the kitchen, and the maids sniggered again. Nat was glad to escape; he wearied of the petticoat tyranny, wearied of the narrow little domestic world. He whistled his tuneless whistle as he turned his back on the house and strode jubilantly away, while Francie was crying her eyes out upstairs. Before he had reached the store, Nathan had forgot her; it was only when his fingers touched the coin in his pocket that she recurred to his mind, and then with the emphatic hope that none of the other young men would hear of that ridiculous

scene. Yet he was really fond of Francie, who was a sweet-tempered, patient, good child, always ready to run her fat little legs off waiting on her aunt, on Georgie who frequently availed himself of her willingness, on anybody who asked her; always conscientiously laboring over her scales and five-finger exercises, and getting her lessons every night with a devotion to duty which should have stirred Nat's admiration. He had officiated as sexton at the funerals of sundry dolls, birds, puppies, and so on, and endeavored so often to soothe the grief of the chief mourner, even to the point of whittling out monuments with eulogies of the deceased and planting rose-bushes upon the graves, that he knew Francie's faithful and affectionate disposition; her attachment to him was as natural as her attachment to Rover, the old collie, he thought, with a laugh. In this wide world there was not another soul who cared enough about him to weep at parting; and it seems to me now that Nat might have been more appreciative. But the young man was a young man, and his most absorbing thought just now was of himself and his career.

It is strange to me at this present moment to recall with what a thrill of proud resolve Nat Burke ascended his high stool and squared his elbows to his first account-book in that grimy hole where George Marsh reigned supreme. For he *did* reign there, as Nathan would have discovered in less than a day even if he had not had some inkling of it already. The old man could not relinquish that heavy grip of his gear he had held all these years; he *was* DUCEY & Co., as his little world of commerce more than suspected. William Ducey might post his own name over the door as big as he pleased, he might be ever so busy with his rustling heaps of papers, he might bustle about with his thoughtful brow, he might command and countermand twenty times an hour, he was nothing but a figurehead, and we all knew it. Everybody knew it, from the draymen rolling DUCEY & Co.'s casks about on the sidewalks to the brokers and retail tradesmen coming in for their contracts. Mr. Ducey was always formally consulted on any business matter, and he always did as he was told by old George with as good a grace as he could muster. Many people would not have considered his position a hard one; there was a handsome income from the

store and William lived in excellent style. He belonged to the Board of Trade, made a fine figure at banquets and the laying of corner-stones, was an equally good hand at making punch and making speeches. What would Marsh have looked like or how would he have acquitted himself in any of these capacities? The idea is almost fantastically comic. Mrs. Ducey thought her husband the most brilliant, solid, able business-man and financier in the country. What did he think of himself, I wonder? I have seen him yawning secretly over those voluminous papers on his desk; Nat Burke could cast up a column of figures with more readiness, despatch, and skill — to say nothing of that ferret-eyed young Quills yonder on his stool, with his soiled wristbands turned back from his hands as they travelled nimbly up and down the ledger — young Quills who deferred to Mr. Marsh as to the Almighty, and sneered at Ducey behind his back. I daresay poor William knew it; he was not a dull man nor a lazy man; more than likely he chafed sorely at playing second-fiddle; more than likely he cherished his own plans and ideas of making money — of how business should be conducted. Once in his absence a gale of summer wind blew some of the documents off Ducey's desk, strewing them all about the floor, and Nathan, who was performing the duties of an entry-clerk, left his books and descended from his perch to gather them up.

"What's that in your hand? Give it here, Nat," old George growled out suddenly, looking up over his glasses and over the top of the newspaper where he had been studying the New York market report; and Nathan silently laid the sheaf of papers before him. "Virginia Lottery, Wellsburgh, Class I, draws at Alexandria, Va., July 25, 1839. Scheme $30,000, $20,000, 25 of 1000. Tickets $10." "Maryland Consolidated, Class II, draws at Baltimore, Md., Aug. 15, 1839. Scheme $20,000 —" "Kentucky Extra, Class IV, draws —" etc., etc. These were some of the headings; tickets were to be had of Ichabod Bernstein. Such ingenuous notices were common enough in those days; they appeared in all the journals. A fortune awaited the lucky investor of ten dollars in Wellsburgh, Class I, Kentucky Extra, and the rest.

"Huh!" grunted the old man; and Nat having gone to

his work again, Mr. Marsh presently arose and himself deposited the papers on their owner's desk; nor did they exchange a word on the subject then or later.

Mr. Burke, during the time of his clerkship and for some while thereafter, lived in a very small way indeed at a boarding-house in an ungenteel suburb not far from the river, and within easy distance of the store where he liked to arrive as early in the morning as Mr. Marsh, such was his conception of his duty. He had one of the cheapest rooms of this not at all expensive establishment, which was kept by a little, meek, white-eyelashed widow called Slaney — a name which somehow accurately fits and describes her. In time Nat got to be a sort of "trusty" — her oldest and most stable boarder; she told him her whole shabby history, how she had seen better days, how Slaney had deserted her (for she was what Jim Sharpless used to call a brevet-widow, not an actual one); Nathan heard all about Slaney — Slaney who had fallen a victim to the reptilian wiles of a wicked, wicked woman, and not so good-looking either, whatever a man could see in *her*, the dear knows; Slaney who was the soul of honor and loved Mrs. Slaney dearly even if he had been led astray; Slaney who had decamped with the other woman, absent-mindedly carrying off the contents of his employer's cash-drawer at the same time; Slaney whom she loved still and would take back to-morrow. She had a daguerreotype of him on a bracket in her dingy sitting-room with a bunch of immortelles in a pink tinted glass vase underneath it, and used to cry over this relic while she was confiding the story to Nathan. It became pretty familiar to him before he left the widow's roof. "It's a great comfort to talk to you, Mr. Burke; you never say a word — *so* sympathetic!" she would sigh; "and you know there ain't many I can talk to." In truth there were not; her other lodgers were a floating crew, some of whom, alas, did not pay her, and came home tipsy and broke the window-panes; and Mr. Burke knocked one of these gentlemen down the steps and gave him a black eye for calling the poor woman a hideous name. They were most numerous when the Legislature was in session, at which time the town was always very crowded and active; or during the terms of court in our circuit when every tavern and

lodging-house would be filled with lawyers, parties, jurors, witnesses, like a kind of benevolent plague of locusts. I hope Mrs. Slaney made her profit out of them, but it is much to be doubted. She was not a practical soul.

The stir that these visitors made was felt in a general briskening of trade even by DUCEY & Co., whom one would not have supposed affected by their presence in town. But everybody except the Mrs. Slaney's drove a roaring business. The billiard-room clicked merrily all day long, for these overworked legal laborers must have recreation; the coffee-houses were always in full blast day and night — the coffee-houses where coffee was the last thing in the world any one would have got or dreamed of asking for! High Street was lined throughout its length with horses and vehicles; the old Court-house fairly hummed with alert gentlemen loaded with green bags, calf-skin volumes, saddle-bags crammed with documents. Hordes of fledgling lawyers and law-students flocked about the circuit at the heels of the judges and the full-blown attorneys who practised in a dozen counties, and moved majestically in an orbit of cases coming up for trial. Nathan, hurrying up street from the store with a deposit for the bank, might run into a half-score of celebrities, middle-aged gentlemen with white silk hats, looking oddly alike with their strong features, their sonorous voices, their heavy laughter, like a separate and distinct race of men, even to the separate and distinct lawyers' lingo in which they conversed, and of which the young man caught snatches as he passed along, with a pleased and eager curiosity. There were giants in those days; Nathan sometimes heard the young followers pointing out So-and-So from Chillicothe, Such-a-One from Zanesville, to one another with huge respect and admiration; if the great man spoke to one of them, the lucky lad would brag about it a whole day afterwards — "I was coming out of the District-Attorney's room with Charlie Green — you know Charlie Green? — and I just happened to say that in that *quo warranto* action against Buchanan — you know that suit? — in my opinion the whole thing was nothing but a piece of spite-work and if *I* was Buchanan's lawyer, I'd tell him flat that the law was against him, and just give him a hint if he'd stay away from court, I'd fix it for him — that's all he's got to do, you

know, just stay away from court, and then when the case is called, I move a postponement, don't you see, and of course the other side won't hear of that, so then — and just as I got that far somebody tapped me on the shoulder and here it was Hunter — you know Hocking Hunter? — and says he, with that twinkle in his eye — you know that twinkle in his eye? — 'Young man, I see what you're driving at! That, sir, would be pettifogging — rank pettifogging —' just like that he said it, you know that way he has — he had been standing there, listening to me —" and so on and so on to the deep and envious interest of the other youths — even to Nathan, who took a singular delight in this sort of discourse, of which he heard a good deal at Mrs. Slaney's table and elsewhere. Everybody knew everybody; everybody was everybody's friend — a fact which Nat observed with some wonder, having hitherto shared the naïve belief of the layman who expects his lawyer to be at daggers drawn with the attorney on the opposite side.

I have said that this legal activity brought trade to town, even to Ducey's; for as court sat in the closing weeks of the year, besides the ordinary attendance there was always a great in-pouring of farmers and country tradesmen, all of whom got in their money about this time, coming to town to buy or sell or settle up accounts. But in fact the store was a busy place at any season, during old Marsh's administration, and we never lacked custom. He had a tremendous acquaintance with all these gentry, attorneys, brokers, pedlers, drovers, merchants, backwoodsmen, politicians, capitalists — who was there whom George Marsh did not know? He was a man of seventy, had lived in these parts upwards of twenty years, and previous to that had travelled widely over the country and seen the manners of many men and their cities. It was an asset, that acquaintance. Nathan, in the intervals of his work, used to observe with a keen, amused, and not altogether unsatiric interest the dealings of Mr. Marsh with his various clients, many of whom were as rough customers as he proclaimed himself to be. They respected the old man; they knew him to be shrewd and close, yet on the whole kindly, and of an invincible uprightness. They liked him for his plain virtues of a plain man. "That Ducey feller's too stylish for *me* — give me Marsh,"

Nat heard more than one of them say. Plainness was greatly admired in those days, and stylishness equally condemned. But George was innocent of any design to clothe himself in either the one or the other attribute; he was as nature made him, with a stalwart dislike of shams; and, remarking, it may be, some kindred trait in Burke, liked the young man accordingly.

"You know a good deal about these back-country fellows, I take notice, Nathan," he said approvingly; "and you ain't too fancy for 'em. That's right; stick to that. Dress nice, mind your manners — " said old George, spitting with great force and accuracy — "that's natural to a young fellow. But strike a balance; don't be too damn tony; but don't be too hail-fellow-well-met, either. That sounds easy, but it's what some people never learn," he added, his eye wandering quite by accident, I think, in the direction of his nephew-in-law's desk; "of course, you can't treat every man the same, in one sense. You've noticed, I guess, that when it comes to settin' 'em up for some of these men, I'm pretty choose-y, as you might say. I give Ducey — Mr. Ducey, I mean — a hint to take some of 'em home to dinner — and there's others that are a sight better pleased to go up to the Erin-go-Bragh with me, some of the plug-hat-fancy-vest kind, too. It all depends. I wouldn't wonder if I'd have to get you to do some of this before long, Nat. I don't always have the time, and I ain't as young as I was. Now you're young, but I guess you can keep your head; you ain't had any too easy a row to hoe so far, and I guess you've learned some sense. I had when I was your age. And besides —" he fingered his stubbled chin for a moment, and turned his quid — "I reckon," he said with a sudden sharpness of glance, "I reckon you've been through the mill, hey? I guess you ain't any — what d'ye call 'em? — any cherubim, hey, Nat?" and seeing the young fellow redden and stammer, he grinned companionably. "Lord love you," he said benevolently; "I know you ain't regularly hell-bent, like the women think because you go into a billiard-room and take a drink once in a while. No, nor even when you — why, you see, you're safe as long as you know when to call a halt, hey?" finished old George, with unwonted delicacy, and abruptly changed the subject, having indeed been much more expansive than

was his habit. "Who was the fellow that was in here the other day having such a jaw with you?" he asked; "that wasn't Williams or Darnell — I know both of them."

"You mean Pascoe, I guess," Nathan told him, and smiled at the recollection. "He belongs up there where I come from — I've known him all my life. Pascoe's got a lawsuit coming on; he wanted to tell me all about it. He just wanted to talk, you know; you couldn't have stopped him with a pick-axe."

"Law's tricky," observed Mr. Marsh, wisely. He tilted his chair back, and pared off a fresh chew. "Law's tricky. Most any lawyer, that ain't an out-and-out shyster will advise you to keep out of a suit, and you and I will pay some attention to him. But these farmers and backwoodsmen, it's surprising — they're natural-born fighters. They've got to wrestle so to make a living and keep body and soul together, it kind of gets in their blood. They think they're bound to win if they hang on long enough — so they do hang on like terriers. I'll bet there never was one of 'em yet that accepted a compromise. What's Pascoe's trouble?" Nathan explained: "Some man promised him a commission, he says, if he'd sell some land for him. So Pascoe made an effort to sell it to a neighbor up there in our end of the county. And, I believe, he nearly did sell it — the man was sort of hanging on the edge, you know. Well, then along in the spring Marshall — that's the owner's name — died. News travels pretty slow up there, and Pascoe claims he never heard a word about it; and here all at once some fellow steps in and makes the sale to the very man Pascoe had in view, and Marshall's heirs give him the commission. Naturally, Pascoe wants to claim his share, and that's where the hitch comes."

Old Marsh nodded, chewing with a knit brow. "He has a case, I guess," he said. "Who's his lawyer?"

Nathan named him. "I hope they won't fight it through all the courts," he said, for he felt a natural concern for his old friend. "Pascoe hasn't got the money for it. They've always been a foot-loose lot; never made more than a bare living, nor laid up a cent;" and he told Mr. Marsh about the dam, as being the thing most characteristic of Pascoe he knew.

Mr. Burke has rehearsed this conversation and the whole incident of Pascoe's law-suit with a meticulous accuracy, for it actually influenced his entire life. Poor old Pascoe never knew it, nor did Burke himself realize it until the moment when he came to set it down in black and white, and was startled to discover with what vividness the episode returned upon him. That afternoon as he was coming from Mrs. Slaney's dinner towards the store, it being a bright, open December day, and the streets in a pleasant bustle of people, he fell in with Pascoe and was promptly button-holed by his ancient co-worker in dam building and dragged aside at the corner of the State-house yard, where the derricks still stood, and the foundations lingered unfinished for eight or ten years, according to my recollection. "I've been to see him, Nat," Pascoe said, grasping the young man's shoulder; "'n' I told him jest what you said —"

"Good Lord, what did you do that for?" ejaculated Nathan, in dismay. "I don't know a thing about law; he won't thank me for sticking in my oar."

"I know you don't, I know that, and so does he," said Pascoe, impatiently; "but I thought I might's well tell him becuz it's wuth while fer him to know what a person that ain't no lawyer, but's got plenty of jest plain horse-sense, thinks, don't ye see? So I —"

"I suppose you told him that, too, of course?" said Nat, controlling his face.

"Yes. Yes, an' I told him what you thunk about it, 'n' he says th' pint is well taken, Nat; that's jest what he said. 'Th' pint's well taken,' he says. 'Yer young friend has some legal turn,' he says; 'nevertheless, I b'lieve we kin' beat 'em out,' he says. Look," said Pascoe, excitedly clutching the other's arm, "there he comes now — see those three — not th' tall one — th' other's Gov'nor Gywnne, ain't it — him that *was* Gov'nor, I mean. My man's th' little feller[1] on th' outside, with th' drab-colored hat. He's a good one, Nat; he b'longs to th' Lancaster Bar, ye know; they ain't no better set o' lawyers in th' State of Ohio — ner in th' hull United States, I don't believe!"

[1] The name of this gentleman is given; but as he left many descendants, who hold his memory in great and deserved honor, it has been thought best, although the incident can hardly be considered

Nat thought that if the gentleman belonged to the Lancaster Bar, it certainly was not the bar from which he had most recently come. He was short and stout, yet with a sort of heavy activity in his step, which might have been a little steadier, perhaps. But although his strongly marked face was flushed and his laughter pretty ready, he contrived somehow to be slightly drunk without much loss of dignity. There was a jolly strength about him, a relaxed and jovial power. Nathan knew Governor Gwynne, as did every one else in town, by sight at least. Nat had often seen him in church, and two or three times at the Ducey house, where his family visited. And the other, a very tall man, as tall as Governor Gwynne, but fleshier, and so dark of complexion that he might almost have been taken for a negro, was a familiar figure on our streets, being fairly sure, it was supposed, of the nomination for governor next year on the Whig ticket, and a most agreeable, conversational, plain-mannered, and popular gentleman. "He's a leetle how-come-you-so, jest a *leetle* — it's nothin', they all drink more or less. I tell ye he's a big one, one of th' biggest they've got," whispered Pascoe, with eyes of awe on his counsel. "There, Nat, he's lookin' right this way — he saw me — see him wave his hand!" said Pascoe, pleasantly excited by this signal, and not in the least shocked or put about by his man-of-law's departure from the paths of temperance. Pascoe himself was as seasoned a drinker as I ever knew; he was a little, hard, knotty man who lived to an inordinate old age, something like ninety or a hundred, in complete refutation of the theory that the use of tobacco and stimulants tends to shorten the life of man.

"I guess I'd better be getting along to the store, Pascoe," said Nat, observing that this trio was bearing down in their direction, and not feeling particularly anxious for notice; "let me know when your case comes on to be tried —"

"Don't you want to see him?" said Pascoe, with something of the showman's pride. "Sho, Nat, you ain't 'fraid of 'em,

discreditable, to omit it. And it is interesting to note that the habit of strong drink never did "get him," as Governor Corwin is here reported to have prophesied. He outlived both his companions on this walk by a score of years, dying in 1892 at a fine old age, and kept the esteem and regard of his fellow-citizens to the last. — M. S. W.

are ye? Why, I'm layin' off to vote fer Corwin —" And the party having by this time got abreast of them, to Nathan's consternation, the short man swung about, and marched directly for him and his companion, the two others halting with a good deal of smiling interest a little distance away.

"Is *zat* young man, Pascal — Pass — *hic* — Passover?" inquired the lawyer; and Pascoe assenting, he lifted his high silk hat with prodigious gravity to the astonished Nathan, and replaced it over one eye. "Young man, shake han's. 'Oh, wise, young zudge, how do I honor thee!' Gwynne, *zish* young man. Tell gem'men what you said in case of Pass — Pass — damn it — Pass —"

"*You'd* better pass, I think," said the dark man, with a laugh; "I'll take the deal. Are you the Daniel, sir? What's your name?"

"Burke — Nathan Burke," said Nat, out of countenance, yet moved with inward laughter.

"Nathan, hey?" interrupted the lawyer. He smote Nat a blow on the chest that almost took the breath out of him, whereat the other burst into a loud laugh. "'Thou art the man!'" he said, and passed an arm around the young fellow's shoulders, leaning on him affectionately. "Shay," he said intimately, "you told Passport he couldn't have a contract with a dead person, didn't you? Told him death ought to dissolve 'greement, didn't you? Smart boy — go up 'head!" he chucked Nathan under the chin. "Who told you, hey?"

"Nobody. I just guessed at it," said Nat, holding him up.

"You hear zat, Gov'nor?" asked the lawyer, tenderly solicitous. Governor Gwynne, who was a man of formal appearance and accounted pretty stiff by those who knew him, looked at him resignedly.

"Did you advise Mr. — ah — this gentleman's client, as he has intimated, Mr. — um — Burke?" he asked with a chilly civility.

"Yes, but I don't know anything about the law — I was only talking," Nat explained. "I know more about other things," he added with a grin, skilfully steadying his newly acquired friend.

"Zat is cut at *me* — most unkindest cut of all," said the latter, with entire good-nature. "Oh, I know I'm drunk, but I ain't so *very* drunk. Why, if I was *very* drunk, Sam

Gwynne wouldn't be seen on the street with me! Zash how I know. Tom would, wouldn't you, Tom? Goo' old Tom! Are you going to vote for Tom, young man?"

"I shan't be voting for anybody for a year or so yet," said Nathan, trying ineffectually to back away.

"What? You don't say so!" exclaimed the dark man, in surprise. "Why, you look twenty-five!"

"Zash load off Tom's mind — he don't have to shake hands with you," said the lawyer, cynically.

"Oh, you go to the devil!" said Tom, half laughing, half annoyed; and he put out his hand. "I want to shake hands with you, Burke, if for nothing but to disprove that. You are studying law? Whose office are you in?"

"Oh, no, I'm not — I'm clerking for Mr. Marsh — DUCEY & Co., you know," said Nathan, a little shyly, wondering within him at the politician's smooth assumption of interest.

"Ah? My advice to you, sir, would be to study law — nothing derogatory to Mr. Marsh's pursuits, of course. Mr. Marsh is a very old and good friend of mine. But the law offers a great career to a young man. We should hear from you, sir, I make no doubt. Good-day, Mr. — er —" he shook hands with Pascoe, who was quite proud, confused, and happy. "I should have liked to think, Mr. Burke, that I might depend on you at the polls," he concluded with an admirable show of warmth.

"I guess I'll have a chance some other time, Mr. Corwin," said Nat, not to be outdone.

"Zat's right, m'boy," said the lawyer, with a grin so knowing it made the young man's face flush. And as the others moved on he hooked his elbow within Nathan's confidentially. "You heard what old Tom said? Shay, it — *hic* — it wasn't *all* gammon, you know. Study law, hey, why don't you?" He released Nat at last and addressed him profoundly. "I am not merry," said he, wagging his head. "I do beguile the thing I am by seeming otherwise. I could never better stead thee than now — Put money in thy purse; go to these wars — no, damn it, thash not what I mean — study law! I say — *hic* — put money in thy purse! Thou shalt see an answerable sequestration. Put money in thy purse. If thou wilt needs damn thyself, do it a more delicate way

than clerking! Fill thy purse with money. Traverse! Go! Adieu!" He gave Nat another staggering thump on the back this time, burst into another thunderous laugh, and swaggered off down the street, his hat on one side, shouting after the others.

"Criminy! I hope he don't git spells like that often," said Pascoe, staring after his legal adviser a little dubiously; "'peared to me that last he said wan't good sense. He must 'a' been more drammy than I took him fer."

"It was sense — it was out of a play. I've read it," said Nat, beginning to laugh in his turn. He went on to the store, passing the ex-governor and Corwin awhile later on one of his errands, as they stood with a knot of others. Their backs were towards him, and Nat was glad to go unnoticed. "No, he's not drinking enough to hurt him *yet*," he overheard the dark man say; "but it'll get him in the end — it always gets 'em, you know." And Nathan heard the rest grunt assent.

Whether Burke's next action had in reality been meditated a long while in some obscure corner of his mind, and it needed only a word like Corwin's or his semi-drunken friend's to bring the plan out into the open, as it were, for more rigid examination, or whether he acted on a sudden and powerful impulse, I can scarcely tell, although the latter would have been unlike him. He went into Mr. Riley's bookstore that evening and asked rather diffidently for a copy of "Walker's Introduction to American Law," and carried the book home, and burned out his meagre fire and Mrs. Slaney's candle, sitting up till an outrageously late hour, so that he went to bed at last shivering, in the dark.

CHAPTER IX

Exoritur Clamor Virum

A DEAL of water has gone under the bridges since the year 1840, when young Nat Burke saw his first presidential campaign. Of all the hot questions of that day, only one survives: the tariff — evidence, I suppose, that truth and error are, poets and sages to the contrary notwithstanding, of an equal vitality. Our State was strongly Whig, as it is now, — the rose by another name smells just as sweet, — and so most of us were protectionists, although, indeed, we did not do near so much talking about protection as nowadays, nor label our views with that name. No, the tariff, if we have always had it with us, was at that time a kind of sleeping dog which we generally let lie; what we bawled and shook our fists over was the criminal mismanagement, the hideous profligacy of the party in power, the V.B.'s, as we referred to them, using the initials of their leader and candidate to evince our indignant disapproval. They called themselves *Democrats* in infamous profanation of a title which in the old glorious days of the Republic stood for everything that was high and noble! Oh, how have we fallen from that great estate, my friends, when a *Van Buren* can etc., etc. Will Mr. Van Buren *say* — will he, in the face of proof, *Deny* — will our friends, the *loco-focos* dare to *affirm* — gentlemen, I pause for a reply!

And lucky he did pause, for he was in imminent danger of bursting a blood-vessel! Burke, skirting the crowds at the corners, or dodging through them in the State-house yard, where the orator would be perched on a horse-block, a cart, a bit of masonry, or any other handy elevation, would catch fragments like the above hurtling through the air and a glimpse of a red-faced man, gesticulating over the heads and bellowing whole-heartedly. Nobody ever did *reply*, our *friends* the *loco-focos* (which, being another term for the

V.B.'s was always pronounced in a tone of mingled disgust and contempt, as who should say, the *noxious reptiles*) never *affirmed*, Mr. Van Buren, secure in the White House a thousand miles away, never *denied*, and so the speaker swept on unhindered to a triumphant conclusion. Everybody was enthusiastically advised, persuaded, adjured to save the country and vote for the FARMER OF NORTH BEND! And as nobody had ever had the slightest intention of voting otherwise, we all used to go home perfectly satisfied — especially those patriots who made a point of getting drunk, or of picking their fellow-patriots' pockets on these occasions. Was ever any man yet converted by a stump-speech? I cannot believe it. We want to hear our own opinions announced and confirmed, not to listen to the other man's. Once in a while the orator would be a Democrat, fluent, trumpet-throated, challenging the opposite party to affirm or deny, and pausing for a reply like the rest. They used to collect a fair-sized audience, too, and doubtless made just as much of an impression upon those who came, choosing to be impressed, and none whatever upon the others. The V.B.'s had the advantage — if it was an advantage — of a platform, one of the first, if not the first, I think, that was ever formulated, wherein their political creed was set forth in condensed and distinct terms; they adopted it at their convention in Baltimore in the spring of that year, and it was sent about and published in all the papers afterwards, to our great interest and edification. The Whigs, on the other hand, had none, and contented themselves with a wholesale and pretty rabid denunciation of things as they were, and a promise of better. And, on the whole, I do not know but that a piece of hearty, thoroughgoing vituperation serves more with the mob than the most subtle and unanswerable argument, if either one of them has any effect at all. The demagogue has his uses and gets from me an unwilling admiration. There were plenty of them on both sides; but from the beginning the Whigs had the best of it with us, as was natural with a candidate who hailed from our own State — although that does not always count, for four years later Tennessee went solid against her native Polk, as I remember, and there are probably other instances. But Harrison enjoyed a tremendous personal popularity; the old warrior, retired

in his virtuous poverty, living upon his own acres, offered a picture singularly pleasing to the republican mind; there was about it a frugal and classic dignity. And with that strange inconsistency which men will display in the mass and yet individually condemn, as jealous as we were of the standing army, as fearful of its potential evil, the soldier-hero candidate was the one we almost invariably elected.

It was little enough that Mr. Burke knew of the merits of either political system at this time; and little enough that anybody cared about his opinions. What to him was friend or foeman? He was too young to cast his ballot at the blacksmith's, carpenters' shops, and feed-stores, where the polling-booths were usually set up; he could only look on, speculate, wonder, and exchange his immature views with other young fellows in like case. He used to listen, not indeed to the street-corner enthusiasts, — Nat had no time for them, — but to the solid, middle-aged or elderly men who always glanced aside from business to talk over the political outlook when they came in to see Mr. Marsh. Trade was a little dull, as it often is during the Presidential campaign (which falls in the same year as the gubernatorial with us), so that everybody had leisure for discussions. The only thing that kept them from being more animated was the fact that almost all these old boys were of the same mind; they raged together over the same abuses, growled or shouted at one another the same savage condemnation of our currency system, which, to tell the truth, was sufficiently loose and ill-ordered and had occasioned them all at one time or another serious inconvenience and loss, and were very strong upon the restriction of the executive powers. Old George himself was a Whig — "But I ain't expecting the millennium if Harrison comes in," he remarked to Nathan; "I've seen too many changes of party for that. I voted for Adams in '96. This country's big and it's changing — changing all the time. What's good this year may be bad ten years from now. And what's good for some States is sure to be not so good for some others — thet's where the hitch comes. You've got to get down to some bed-rock principles, and for the rest of it strike a balance. Now Harrison's an honest man, I guess he was a pretty good general — no reason why he shouldn't make a good President. Most men are about as intelligent

as they are honest; and you'll find that no matter how smart a scoundrel is, he's a fool at the core, after all. I take notice we've never had a scoundrel for a President yet — we've had honest men making some terribly bad mistakes, that's all. The country ain't going to the dogs, like you hear people say, if Van Buren's reëlected; personally I'm opposed to the policy he stands for, and I hope he won't be."

Nathan looked at him musingly, struck with a sudden idea: "It's odd to think that you're not American born, Mr. Marsh," he said; "nobody'd know it to hear you."

"Well, I got transplanted pretty young," said the old man, smiling a little; "I was just about your age — no, a little older, I guess. And a man ain't any good to his country, nor his country to him till he's that old. I've been here fifty years — made all my money here — made all my friends here. The old country ain't anything to me now — it's inevitable you should take up with the land and the people where your home is; you can't help it. Of course you don't hear me blowing around about British encroachment, and giving the old country a black eye whenever I get the chance; but, Nat, you don't hear any sensible person doing that, anyhow, no difference where they come from. You think it's funny, I suppose, that I should be such a strong Harrison man when Harrison licked the boots off the British up there at Tippecanoe, hey?" he added, and reading a surprised and rather abashed consent in the other's face, began to laugh. "That's a good while ago," he said, flourishing his hand; "I'm willing to let by-gones be by-gones. Lord love you, Nat, I'm doing a deal more for Harrison than vote for him, and you know it. Did you send that check to the committee? It was fifty dollars, wasn't it? When are they going to have the demonstration? Three or four weeks, ain't it?"

"Washington's Birthday," Nat told him; "I suppose that's the earliest they could have it on account of the roads. They're pretty bad this time of year; and they're expecting people from all over the State, you know. Why, even Mrs. Slaney's had letters asking for rooms!"

Old George nodded. "Fifty dollars ought to drape the whole damn town in bunting, seems to me," he said. "But I ain't the only one. They've asked everybody for a sub-

scription. I'll bet Sam Gwynne went down into his breeches' pocket. The Supreme Bench would about suit Sam, if he could get there; and I shouldn't wonder if he did this time, being a personal friend of the general's. Sam's always making a great bid for popularity, and yet somehow he's never been very popular, after all."

"They're going to have a big shindy at the demonstration," Nathan observed; "one of the boys from Barlow Brothers was in the other day, and he told me they had a pile of banners as high as the ceiling got ready to stretch across the street, with 'One Term' and 'Union for the sake of the Union' and 'The Constitution and its Defenders' on 'em."

"Well, I don't know," said Mr. Marsh, rubbing his chin; "anything that brings people here's good for the town, I guess — good for business — still —"

"Why, won't we have to shut up?"

"Wouldn't wonder. On the twenty-second, anyhow. I've had about forty people ask for places to see the parade — at the upstairs windows, you know. Mrs. Ducey wants to bring a party down — big mistake to my notion, women and children in a crowd like that, full of drunken men and Lord knows what besides. 'Tain't safe; I told Anne so. But the next thing you know she'd got a plan to take the carriage and horses —"

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated Nathan, perturbed. He had had trouble with the horses, who were a spirited pair, during his administration, and, as is not uncommonly the case, doubted any other man's ability to manage them.

"Yes, and drive around to the corner of Long and High, and watch the procession from there, because it would be so much the best way to see it, sitting in the carriage! 'The devil it would!' says I. 'You'd better come to the store, after all, I guess.' And then, by damn, Burke, she says: 'Why, Uncle George, how you do chop and change around! You said you didn't want us to come to the store!' Ho, ho!"

Nathan had to join in the other's laugh; he could almost hear Mrs. Ducey. Yet it was with a good deal of concern that he said: "She oughtn't to do that, Mr. Marsh. Can't you stop her? You can't depend on those horses, and there'll be yelling and singing and commotion and two or three brass

bands, and somebody told me they were going to have some kind of floats with log-cabins, — imitation ones, I mean, — and a whole lot more foolishness. It'll be enough to drive any horse crazy."

"You might tell her that yourself, if you think it'll do any good," said Mr. Marsh, coolly; "she says she knows any number of people who are going to see it that way; and the horses are perfectly safe! 'That's a mistake,' says I; 'you can bank on it there ain't *any* safe horses; there's a few safe *drivers*, and I don't know whether this young Williams fellow is one of 'em or not.' But it seems George is going to drive; they won't have room for anybody but the family."

"George!"

"That's what I'm told. I said, 'Well, that's all right if, after you get there, you'll have the horses taken out and led around to the back of the square, or somewhere where they'll be out of the fuss.' She said —" He paused to bite off a chew.

"*That* would be safe," said Nat, in relief. "Did she say — ?"

"She said '*H'm!*'" said old George, grinning.

The Log-Cabin-and-Hard-Cider enthusiasts were not the only ones, however, who approached Mr. Marsh for support and contributions. There was already a third party in the field, destined to play a much greater rôle in our national affairs than any of us supposed. For one day, as Nathan was occupied at his desk, Mr. Ducey overwhelmingly busy amongst his papers as usual, and Marsh sitting in his customary chair behind them, with his feet under the stove which was introduced into the little back office during the winter months, there walked in a body of important-looking gentlemen, headed by one with a black coat, a white neckcloth, and a long, harsh-featured, and coffin-shaped face in whom Nat recognized Doctor Sharpless, a divine of the Presbyterian church, where the young man sometimes — I was about to say worshipped, but I fear that is not what Mr. Burke did. He used to go in diffidently of a Sunday morning and take a seat at the rear, in a rather dark corner, whence he could steal unobserved before the sermon began or fall comfortably asleep during its progress, waking up inopportunely sometimes with a snort and a jerk and conscious of a ghastly break in Mr.

Sharpless's eloquence, while the reverend gentleman who, fortunately, was quite near-sighted, peered in his direction. Yet the doctor's sermons were by no means soothing in their substance; the nether fires blazed in them; the worm that dieth not was incredibly active. Retribution, punishment, awful and eternal, Mr. Sharpless brandished at his congregation and dinned into the ears of his God. Nathan — and this, sad to say, was the profane employment in which he spent most of his waking hours during the service — used to study the backs of the two feminine Sharplesses as they sat in the ministerial pew directly beneath the pulpit and wonder if those gentle, quiet, and sweet-faced women, particularly the younger one, the daughter with her devoutly drooped head and long, dark, shadowy lashes, had to suffer this incendiary oratory all day long. It was frightful to imagine what the smallest peccadillo might entail, were it committed under Mr. Sharpless's eye. When he stalked in at the head of his fellows, "Powers above!" thought Nat; "he can't be going to haul old George up before the judgment seat!" For it was impossible to divest the minister of his professional solemnity; and equally impossible to figure either a curse or a blessing taking any effect on old Mr. Marsh. The latter, in fact, upon seeing the party, grunted a welcome, got up without any appearance of concern, and shook hands all around as if they had been ordinary sinners like himself. And when he sat down again, and asked what he could do for them, looking them over meanwhile with his shrewd, not unkindly eyes, with his heavy fists planted on the arms of his chair, he dominated even Mr. Sharpless. What he could do for them, it appeared, was, I daresay, what Mr. Marsh had expected — he could subscribe to the campaign fund of the Abolition Party, which this committee represented. Nathan, arrested by the words, listened in spite of himself. It was the first time he had heard of that party, their principles not being at all widespread, nor the subject of much discussion in those days.

"In the convention held at Warsaw, New York State, last November, Mr. Marsh," explained Mr. Sharpless, coughing and drawing a severe document from the tail-pocket of his black coat, "our party nominated, as you probably know, Mr. James G. Birney of New York for President —"

"I know Birney," said old Marsh, briefly.

"Ah? And for Vice-president Francis J. Lemoyne of Pennsylvania, both men who would be an honor to any cause, Mr. Marsh —"

"I thought they'd declined?" said Mr. Marsh, in a tone of amiable inquiry.

"They have signified that intention — but, Mr. Marsh, they cannot decline, they will not be allowed to decline. Ours is a sacred cause, a holy cause, the cause of freedom, of righteousness, of humanity — no man can refuse the privilege of being standard-bearer to such a cause," said Sharpless, with energy, the color coming into his long, pale face, quite unconscious of either humor or irony in his statement. "If you will allow me to read you the resolutions passed at the convention" — he opened the paper and began to read in the same loud, resonant, and determined voice in which he delivered the erring over to everlasting damnation every Sunday — "'every consideration of duty and expediency which ought to control the action of Christian freemen requires of the Abolitionists of the United States to organize a distinct and independent political party, embracing all the necessary means for nominating candidates for office and sustaining them by public suffrage —'"

Old Marsh listened in silence, rubbing his chin; Ducey yawned behind his hand, and presently got up, excusing himself, and went into the outer store with some vague murmur about waiting on a customer; Nathan went back to his ledger, not much impressed. Only twenty years more and the guns would be roaring at Gettysburg and Antietam, and the death-lists coming up every morning, and what wretched crop of tears and misery and bitter hatred should we reap from our forefathers' wretched sowing! We were not dreaming of that in Mr. Marsh's little, dingy office that gray January morning of 1840 while we listened to Mr. Sharpless read; one member of the committee had a cold and punctuated the discourse with trumpet-like brayings into a pale yellow bandanna handkerchief, I remember. Nat heartily wished they would wind up the business, get whatever "necessary means" they could out of old George, and go their ways. The young man thought Mr. Sharpless's fierce enthusiasm a little discredited his cause; he was one of the fanatics, headlong, impractical, somewhat — to be frank — somewhat bloody-

minded, without whom no great movement is ever accomplished.

"What do we expect to do?" he echoed when Mr. Marsh had risen and, taking out his check-book, gone over to his desk, which he did rather to Nathan's surprise, after a very little talk; "what do we expect to do? Why — why, can you ask that, Mr. Marsh? You've lived in the South, you've witnessed the iniquities of slavery, the unspeakable degradation of the trade in human flesh — and you ask us what we expect to do!"

"Well, I don't imagine you're going to buy up all the niggers and set 'em free with the help of my contribution, Doctor Sharpless," said the old man, looking up from the quill he was shaping — we still used quills in the office in deference to his whim; he tried the nib on his thumb-nail and went on; "that wouldn't quite settle the trouble. And, of course, you ain't going to spend it buying drinks for the voters and getting on the right side of 'em generally. No, I know you won't do that," he added, grinning openly as he met the minister's expression of horror; "no, of course, this is for legitimate campaign expenses — hiring halls and paying for lighting 'em, and printing and stationery and postage and all that. Well, I'd just as lief give something towards it. I believe you Abolitionists are in earnest" — his manner distantly suggested to Nathan — "if you *are* a pack of fools — " but the others probably did not so construe it.

"We felt that you sympathized with the cause, Mr. Marsh, we knew that we could relie on your support" — Sharpless began warmly. Old George held up an arresting hand. With the other he lifted the check with the wet ink shining on it and waved it to and fro over the stove.

"You're out there, Mr. Sharpless," he said. "I don't exactly sympathize with your cause — not the way you mean, that is."

"What? Why, Mr. Marsh, I myself have heard you say that you left the South because you did not approve of the condition of slavery. The negro —"

"The niggers!" said Marsh, contemptuously; "why, Mr. Sharpless, I don't give a damn for the niggers. It's the white people I'm thinking about. I don't know that slavery harms a nigger; bond or free, he ain't much good that I can see. But there's no question but what it's bad for his master.

You're right saying I got away from the South because of slavery — I couldn't stand the white men it made. Slavery rots 'em out; there ain't a country nor a race on the face of the globe that can stand up against it. If it paid, there'd be something to say for it. But, by God, sir, it don't pay! I lived there ten years, and I've got it figured pretty fine. It's the most costly and least profitable labor you can employ — why, even a planter will acknowledge that, if he's a smart fellow, and you can get him to go into the calculations with you. It's death to any kind of enterprise or ambition to live alongside it. If you could get hold of the planters and make 'em understand that," suggested Mr. Marsh, folding up the check and shoving it into the minister's slightly hesitant hand, "you might do some good. Only they haven't been brought up to look at things in a practical way, and it's hard to beat it into a man with two or three hundred nigger slaves and a big sugar or cotton plantation that he's got the little end of the bargain, after all. But there's no use antagonizing 'em with a lot of blood-and-thunder talk about the degradation and infamy of their own lives. In the first place you don't know anything about their lives —"

"Mr. Marsh," said Sharpless, in a trembling voice, and rising with dignity in front of his scandalized committee, "I have always supposed you to be a Christian man, but it seems to me you take an unfair advantage of — of — you think your generosity gives you the privilege to — to —"

"Before you go any farther, sir, I'd like to ask you one question," pursued old George, unmoved. "Have you ever been in the South? Have any of you ever been in the South? No? Well, then, gentlemen, I say what I said before, — you don't know anything about it. Now when I tell you the niggers, generally speaking, are treated as well as they deserve, it's the truth. Nine-tenths of the stories you've been hearing and believing are damn lies. If you'd leave off harping on that string and show 'em where the system's at fault, and how much they're out of pocket by it, seems to me you'd stand a better chance of persuading 'em to your views —" he ushered them out with no great ceremony. Whatever the feelings with which they had listened to this exceedingly plain exposition of Mr. Marsh's opinions, they realized he had no more time to spend on them.

"Queer old file, Sharpless, isn't he?" said Ducey, amiably, returning to the office; "I can't stand these Abolitionists — they're too visionary for *me*. No earthly chance of their candidate's election — no earthly chance, and here they come around asking for money! The whole idea is so impractical. Why, they couldn't get along without slaves down South; the climate would kill white laborers. But, of course, Sharpless would never take anything like that into consideration — perfectly impractical, like all the rest of them," said William, worrying among his papers with much importance. "Ever heard Sharpless preach? I went once; the sermon was solid hell-fire from beginning to end. That boy of his is absolutely worthless, they say."

"Huh! Never saw him," growled his senior, carelessly, and there followed a silence and a great industry of pens at all the desks. Nat was faintly disappointed; he had hoped somehow that Mr. Ducey, having begun on the Sharpless family, would continue — would say something about — why, about Mrs. Sharpless, to be sure, or even Miss Sharpless. Nathan had never seen the son either, so, naturally was not interested in him. But it happened that a week or so later, going into the tap-room of the Erin-go-Bragh one afternoon, and investing in a glass of something hot to ward off the severity of a nipping winter air, Mr. Burke inadvertently laid down upon the counter in payment a piece of money which he generally kept carefully bestowed in a separate pocket against just such accidents, to wit: Francie Blake's quarter, that storied coin. He finished the drink and came away, but luckily discovered his loss almost at once and hurried back. The place had been nearly empty, so that he had good hopes of tracing it.

"I gave you two bits for that whiskey-toddy, didn't I?" he asked the barkeeper. "It's a keepsake and I'd like to get it back. Here's another. My quarter was dated 1837, and had N. B. scratched with a pen-knife on one side and F. B. on the other — the scratches weren't deep enough to show very much. Will you look in the till, please?"

The barkeeper obligingly consented, but he searched in vain, even going so far as to spread a handful of quarters, all there were in the drawer, for Nathan to examine himself. "I'd hate to lose it," said the latter, poking and prying about with genuine regret.

"I changed a dollar for that feller in the corner, see him? Maybe he's got it. Oh, Jim!" said the barkeeper, and he pointed into the back room where there was a billiard-table at which Nat, in common with the other patrons of the establishment, occasionally performed. It was empty at the moment except for a young man sitting at a little wooden table by the window and writing in the failing light at an amazing rate of speed, with a pile of foolscap sheets in front of him. He was a tall young man, very thin, shabbily dressed, and lantern-jawed, in a coat buttoned up close to the neck, with a frayed black stock, no collar, and no cuffs. He looked up as they spoke and, on being called, caught Nat's eye, and nodded pleasantly. "Just a minute," said he; "I think I've got your quarter, sir." He wiped his pen on the sleeve of his all but ragged surtout, arose, and presently fished out the two bits from an old leather pocket-book in which, as Nathan could not help seeing, there was very little else. "Eureka!" he said with solemnity, handed it over, bowed with a flourish, and went back to his writing. It appeared to be finished, for he gathered up the papers in a moment, clapped on a moth-eaten beaver hanging on the back of his chair, and walked off, nodding to Nat once more with a smile so sudden, genial, and valiant, spite of his poor outside, as to move one with an inexplicable liking.

"Who is he, do you know?" said Burke to the barkeeper, vaguely conscious of having seen the other elsewhere.

"Yes, oh, yes. He comes in here all the time to write. We've got to calling that table his, it's where he always sits. He writes for the *Journal* or maybe the *Independent* — I dunno — don't make much difference to Jim, I guess. They've got a lot of new papers started just for the campaign, you know, the *Straight-out Harrisonian*'s one of 'em — b'lieve he writes for that, too. Seen it? I guess Jim ain't just wallerin' in money, like old Pop Marsh," said the barkeeper, who knew Nathan — knew, indeed, every man in town and was a kind of walking directory. He wiped off the counter and went on, "Why, his name's Sharpless, he's the preacher's son — kinder on the outs with the old man, I hear."

CHAPTER X

Log-Cabins-and-Hard-Cider

Somebody estimated that there were between twenty and thirty thousand people quartered in the capitol city the week of Washington's Birthday — something like four or five times its regular population. Notwithstanding three days' steady rain, and a condition of the roads and rivers which, had the visit been necessary for business instead of pleasure, would have been considered impassable, the town was full of celebrating Harrisonians; and more were arriving by every stage, in their own conveyances, on horseback, and afoot. The taverns overflowed; the Ducey house was crowded, every house in town was crowded; and it was reported that Governor Gwynne, who was entertaining the Whig Campaign Committee, had all the rooms in his big mansion occupied and cots in the parlors. Burke, going home at six o'clock in the evening, found the bed not yet made up in his little room, and Mrs. Slaney dashing right and left with her head tied up in a towel, flustered, untidy, and happy. "Oh, Mr. Burke," she panted; "I'm so sorry your room ain't fixed, but you're so sympathetic I knew you'd understand. I ain't had as much to do since Slaney went away. He kind of drew people to the house, you know, card-playing gentlemen and such."

Nat had a shrewd guess that there were probably some few of Mr. Slaney's acquaintances amongst all these single-hearted supporters of the Farmer of North Bend. You might see them following their chosen profession in the back rooms of a dozen coffee-houses, or congregated about the doors, wielding gold toothpicks in a graceful manner, impassive, pale-faced, shifty-eyed, in rich waistcoats festooned with watch-chains, with shining bell-crowned hats perched aslant on their sleek bears' greased locks. They swaggered along our streets, flourishing their canes, arm in arm, leering into all the women's bonnets as they passed; it

gave us something of a brilliant, metropolitan air. It also strengthened Mr. Burke's conviction that these crowds were no place for women and little children, and indeed, setting aside the strangers, one did not see very many of them. The mob, if good-natured and on the whole orderly, was yet of a roughness seldom or never seen nowadays; and hard cider, the drink of this campaign, was being absorbed with a great deal too much patriotic zeal to suit the quieter element in the community. Some Democrats and even some Abolitionists must have generously agreed to forego their animosity and join in this particular species of ratification; for Nathan identified not a few whose adverse opinions were notorious, and nobody could possibly have been drunker or shouted for Harrison with more fervor. All the street-corner orators redoubled their efforts; the *Journal* came out with flaming editorials; ever so many poets burst into spontaneous song. They saluted the Whig candidate with: "Hail, Warrior Chieftain of the West!" or admonished the

> ". . . 'Powers that be'
> That our bleeding country shall be free,
> And breathe its wonted prosperity.
> Yes, Tippy! . . ."

And so on; the narrow bounds of verse probably required the last abbreviation; Tippecanoe is a word that defies the muse. Otherwise nothing was too much for these gallant rhymesters.

In spite of the rain which fell with a sodden persistence up till the very day of the celebration, when it eased everybody's mind by finally clearing off, the decorations, flags, canvas banners, portraits, and all the rest were put in place; and there was a stupendous activity among the speakers, singers, musicians, and others who were to figure in the exercises. Some bandsmen rented a warehouse-loft over against the Slaney residence and kept the whole neighborhood awake until the small hours, booming and blowing "Tippecanoe and Tyler too," and like melodies, till an indignant sufferer in the room beneath Burke's sent a boot-jack through their window and broke up the meeting. Nat heard the crash and swearing, as he lay with his law-books

striving to study, and blew out the candle and turned over, chuckling. He told Mr. Marsh about it the next day in an odd hour, to the old man's infinite amusement. They had decided to shut up the store; an enterprising adventurer came along and wanted to exhibit a number of chained 'coons, which, he said, were "regular Harrisonian emblems," and sure to attract trade, in the front part; but Nat, who happened to be in charge at the time, declined. The young man, who was always soft-hearted, felt a pity for the harassed animals worrying at their bonds; he would have liked to buy them all and set them free, but their owner, perceiving this mood, over-cannily set such a staggering price upon his captives that Nat had to give up his sentimental plan. That same morning he had seen, with another pang of foolish sympathy, the live eagle chained to its stake in the State-house yard, which they proposed to carry aloft in the procession the next day — a poor sort of symbol of Liberty, Nat thought. One of its legs was broken, and Heaven knows in what pain and fever the creature sat erect, motionless, and sleepless on its narrow perch. There was a crowd of ruthless idlers about, women with babies, louts of lads, and one of these latter was prodding the poor bird with a stick, an indignity it bore with the same fierce indifference, paying no heed when Nathan cuffed its tormentors aside and dissolved the circle of spectators. Bird of Freedom, indeed!

Mr. Burke himself took no part in the ceremonies, having rejected the sole opportunity offered him — that of parading with the Harrison Guards who had been advertised through the papers that they were requested "to appear in uniform at your armory the 20th inst., at early candle-light, for the purpose of Drill and to make preparation for our parade on the 22d (Washington's Birthday). And we also invite any young gentleman of respectable standing in society to meet with us." Some of the clerks were members of this body, but Nathan laughingly refused their invitations. There would be enough people making fools of themselves (he privately was of opinion) without him.

"I know one man that won't vote for Harrison, anyhow," he said to Mr. Marsh, and repeated what he could remember of Jake Darnell's openly expressed disapprobation. "He used to say he hadn't anything against Harrison as a general

in the field, but up there before the Fort Meigs fight, Jake said it was a case of 'one's afraid and t'other dasn't' with Harrison and Proctor both," said Nat; "each one of 'em thought the other was too strong for him and put the fight off as long as he decently could, Darnell says. And he used to insist that Harrison didn't treat Croghan right when he could hear the guns at Fort Stephenson only ten miles away and knew how small Croghan's force was, and yet didn't send him any help. When I was a boy, I thought if I could only grow up to be like Croghan, I'd be the finest man on earth; Jake made such a hero of him. But he used to be quite severe on Harrison."

"Huh! There ain't anything to that — that's just talk. He'll be as ready to vote the straight Whig ticket as anybody," said Marsh, sagely. And to Nat's surprise this prophecy came literally true. He ran across old Darnell in the crowds not long before the celebration, and found him enthusiastically drinking hard cider to the success of "Old Tip" with some chance-met Harrisonians as if no candidate could have better suited him!

"Take a drink, Nat, take drink — here, lemme pay fer it — don't you pay fer it," he said eagerly, seeking for the money with his unsteady hands. "Lemme pay fer all yer drinks, boys — this one's on me — my turn, y'know. Here, you feller, bring s' more cider — *hard* cider — hard's you've got it. Why, boys, I fit with Harrison, I fit — *hic* — fer him there up to Fort Meigs. My name's Darnell, you all know *me*, I guess. Ol' Darnell, ol' Jake Darnell. Dunno who'd vote for Harrison if 'twouldn't be me, hey? Take drink, Nat, don't be backwards. Lord, I'll pay fer it. My frien' Nat Burke, boys, known him ever since he was so high —"

"You didn't use to let me drink in those days, Jake," said Nathan, with a laugh; "I was a sort of a good boy, don't you remember?"

"So ye was, Nat, so ye was, durned if ye wasn't the best boy I ever seed," said his poor old friend, shaking him warmly by the hand, with watery eyes; "take some cider. Cider can't hurt ye — but you oughtn't ever to touch no whiskey, Nat," he added warningly; "takes a ver' strong man stand whiskey. You stick to cider — take a drink. 'S

on me, y'know. Young feller like you ain't got much money, *I* know that. My treat, boys, step up!"

"I guess I don't want any just now, Jake. Look here, where's Nance?" said Nat, and was gratified to see Jake straighten up with a sudden and startling return to soberness, and look all about him, muddled yet himself.

"I dunno, I dunno where Nance is," he said with concern; "I brung her here — leastways she jest *would* come with me. Kinder sot on it, th' way women git, y'know, Nat, an' I jest nachelly couldn't git out o' bringin' her. I left her at a store tradin'. She hadn't orter be alone, d'ye think? 'Tain't any place fer a girl, is it, Nat?" He looked at Nathan with a piteous perplexity and self-abasement. "I wisht I knew how to take keer of Nance; I ain't fitten fer to have a daughter an' that's th' truth, an ol' drunken houn' like me. It's hard, Nat."

Nathan got him away from his boon companions without further trouble; indeed, these jolly gentlemen were well pleased to part when they saw there was nothing more to be got out of their backwoods acquaintance. Darnell presently remembered where he had left the girl, and sought the place with a painful anxiety; he accused himself bitterly as they went along. Nathan followed and listened, touched and wondering; it struck him that Jake was getting old or else his way of life was beginning to tell on him at last. Burke had never before known him to be garrulous in his cups; and there was an occasional feebleness in his voice or look or movements that was not from drink.

"I don't know why you worry so about Nance, Jake," he said, trying to allay the other's fears; "she's a good girl — she's all right — she can't come to any harm. You see she's just as smart as she's pretty — and plucky too. Nobody'd make free with Nance, I guess," said Nat, with conviction, remembering the girl's free and determined spirit.

"They'd better not," said Darnell, with a flash of the quick, cool, hard, and ready man whom Nathan recollected in the old days; it was gone in an instant, and he caught at the young fellow's arm almost with timidity as they crossed the street among the moving vehicles. "It's gittin' too crowded up aroun' th' settlements fer me — I reckon I'll have to put out fer th' Illinois er mebbe Iowy Territory," he said com-

plainingly; "wisht I'd 'a' gone long ago. I don't like so many *people*, Nathan, I ain't ever got used to 'em. That's what makes me suspicious-like fer Nance, you know. She thinks everybody's *good*. Well, they ain't good, you 'n' I know that. A woman don't hev' no chanct to know about people — a girl that ain't ever had any mother, like Nance. She's got a kinder idee Mrs. Ducey's th' Angel Gabriel, like it tells 'bout in th' Bible," said Darnell, whose notions of Holy Writ, while reverent, were somewhat misty; "well, I don't guess Mrs. Ducey's any angel — you'd oughter hear Joe Williams, nothin' but a boy, of course, but still —! You never talked none, Nat, but I guess you *know*, jest th' same. But Nance always was one to take up with some wild notion like that — Lord, you remember how she's always been — an' she'll stick to it, too. It'll make her trouble some day when I'm dead and gone — 'less'n you'll look after her, like you said you would," he finished weakly; and Nathan again promised him, a little saddened.

They found her in the shop, radiant among heaps of bright goods the salesman was spreading out before her. Burke had scarcely ever seen Nance busied in so womanly a fashion; his boyhood recollections vaguely presented her as a slim, sun-colored creature, sexless and wild, bare-footed, in the gaudy calicoes she loved, familiar with the fields and deadenings, a sister to fauns and dryads. That Nance could be a woman, and a very beautiful one at that, took him afresh with surprise and a sharp understanding of Darnell's fears. He resented the look of patronizing admiration the clerk bent on her as she hung over his tawdry stuffs. Nance did not see it, perhaps would not have interpreted it if she had; she was quite absorbed, forgetful of her responsibilities. They returned upon her visibly as she looked up with her deer-like alertness at her father's step.

"Where you been? Where's yer money?" she said sharply — but with the sort of sharpness with which she might have addressed a child; there was a note of defence and protection in it. She looked at Nathan and her face cleared. "Oh, was you with him, Nat? My, how grand we are, ain't we? You — why, you're all kind of growed up!" She eyed him with frank commendation.

"It's all right, Nance — I got my money — here, mebbe

you'd better take it, though," said Darnell, humbly, and brought out his old wallet and thrust it into her hands. "They's eight dollars there. I — I didn't spend none — not to 'mount to anything, that is," he assured her. "Git what ye want — git what ye want. Show her some kinder pretty women fixin's, will ye, mister?" he said to the clerk; and the latter, happening to glance aside at Nathan, very wisely banished the smirk and wink which he had allowed to show momentarily upon his countenance.

"I dunno whether to take this plaid piece er this here solid red," sighed Nance, in a blissful indecision, returning to the unwonted delights of her shopping. "It's fer to wear at th' big meetin', ye know, Nathan, next week," she explained parenthetically; "I'm goin' along with th' Williamses — an' did Pap tell ye? He's goin' to be in th' march, ain't ye, Pap?"

"I was layin' off not to tell him that," said Darnell, sheepishly; "I — I reckon it would 'a' s'prised you, Nat, to see me settin' up in one of these here picture wagons they're goin' to hev'. Did you know 'bout 'em? You ain't in it, are ye?"

Burke laughed as he told him no, and Jake went on to describe the preparations enthusiastically. They were goin' to hev' kinder platforms on wheels, not so very high from th' ground, y'know, not more'n three feet, he guessed, or it wouldn't be stiddy, with two-three teams hitched on an' drawin' 'em along. An' reg'lar made-up pictures on 'em — he didn't know what you'd call 'em — he never heard of nothin' like 'em before. They was to be a log-cabin — a sure 'nough *log-cabin*, built of logs, Nat, with a little winder like we used to hev' made out'n greased paper. D'ye b'lieve they'd come to him an' to ol' Pascoe to find out how 'twas done? An' a chimney-place of stones chinked up with clay-mud, 'n' a fire in it, 'n' a mess o' mush in a kittle hangin' over it —

"An' deerskins nailed up outside to dry, ye know, Nat, 'n' b'ar, 'n' otter pelts," Nance chimed in; "'n' Pap'll be settin' with his ol' rifle crost his knees right in th' door!" She patted him on the shoulder, and Darnell chuckled a little excitedly and foolishly.

"Cat's out'n th' bag now," he said; "I was fixin' fer to

give yeh a s'prise. But who ever heerd of a woman that c'ld keep er secret?"

"I didn't know yeh didn't want fer him to know *that*," Nance explained; "I thort all along when you was talkin' 'bout s'prisin' Nathan, ye meant sunthin' else — that *other*, yeh know." She looked at him meaningly, but Darnell stared in evident bewilderment; his mind had been occupied with the spectacular rôle wherein he would presently figure before the crowds to the exclusion of everything else. Once launched upon that topic it was with a painful slowness that he addressed himself to any other. "What? I don' unnerstan' — what yeh mean, hey?"

"Why, that 'bout — 'bout Nathan's Gran'paw Granger, don' yeh rec'lect?" said the girl. She began to insist anxiously; "'*course* ye rec'lect, Pap. Yeh was tellin' me 'bout it yestiddy. Sunthin' 'about th' Refugee Track it was — *you* remember. Granger he owndęd th' hull of th' Track — wan't that it?"

"Gracious, that *is* a sure enough surprise!" Burke ejaculated in open amusement; "the whole of the Refugee Tract! *Whew!* The town's built all over it now — right where we stand. What a pity Grandpa Granger didn't know he was going to have a grandson! He might have held on to it, and willed me some."

"No, *no*, that wan't it, Nathan," Darnell interrupted, a little irritated partly at the other's laughing incredulity, partly, no doubt, at the slow working of his own mind or memory. "No, ye got it wrong — Nance got it wrong," he repeated crossly, yet still in a pathetic confusion; "I — I dunno jest how 'twas — but 'twan't *that* way. Nance she's got it wrong — yeh hadn't orter tell th' wimmenfolks anything 'bout — 'bout proputty. They jest nachelly cain't hold ther tongues."

"Well, Nat's gran'paw was a Britisher Refugee, 'n' th' Gov'ment give him some lan' fer to live on, anyhow," said Nance, not at all cast down by this severity; perhaps it pleased her as an evidence of returning spirit or activity in her father. "He tol' yeh so himself, didn't he?"

"Yes, but he never said he owned *all* of th' Track — they was more 'n' him Refugees," said Darnell, with impatience. He turned to Burke. "Ef he hadn't 'a' died, I reckon yeh

might hev' heired it, Nat, like yeh was sayin'. Yeh needn't ter grin that way. I was thinkin' 'bout it th' other day, an' I sez to myself, 'By criminy, *I* don't b'lieve Nat *knows* 'bout that there ol' Refugee Track. I'd orter tell him,' an' then this here procession fer Washin'ton's Birthday, an' me bein' in it an' all kinder put yer gran'paw out'n my head."

"I guess he didn't own enough to keep anybody awake nights worrying over it," said Nat; "much obliged to you for telling me just the same, Jake. Some day I'd like for you to tell me everything you can remember about my grandfather — when you have time and feel like it, you know."

He assented vaguely. Sartain, yes — when he had time. He went on talking about the parade. It appeared there were to be other log-cabins — "besides them fellers that's comin' down from Cuyahoga with th' full-rigged ship — don't that beat all, Nat? A lake-schooner as large as life, only sot up on some kind of platform on wheels like th' rest of us!" Darnell said delightedly; "somebody was tellin' me 'bout it. I'm kinder skeered that'll lay over our log-cabins — don't want them Cuyahogy fellers to beat us, y'know. I'm in th' first cabin — yeh want to look fer us along the Franklinton Road some time 'bout noon. An' Nance she's goin' to be with Mis' Williams 'n' some of th' children, 'n' stand somewheres near th' corner of Long 'n' High, so's I'll know where to look fer her. You be there, too, will ye? Ye wanter see me in th' cabin, don't ye, Nat? Tell you, it'll be th' biggest sight ever was 'round here, them cabins!"

Nathan promised him to be on the spot; indeed he made an inward resolve to look after the old man as far as possible. "I guess you think I'd orter not let him do it," Nance said to him privately. She knotted her black brows and looked at him wistfully. To Burke there was something at once sad and beautiful in these mutual anxieties of father and daughter; as seemed to be his fate, he was the confidant of both. "I couldn't help it," the girl went on; "they come and said he was a pioneer, 'n' he'd orter do it. An' he wanted to so much himself. They wanted to know ef he didn't hev' a coonskin cap 'n' moccasins. 'Land!' says I, 'of course he has. He wears 'em all th' time when he's huntin'.' Don't that jest bang everything ye ever heerd,

Nat? 'Pears to me they've gone clean crazy. I'd 'a' put a nice white biled shirt 'n' a pair o' boots on him, but they won't hev' it. An' all he's got to do is jest set in th' cabin door, an' hev' folks look at him. I don't like it overly well. *I* don't want Pap made no show of. But he likes it — he — I reckon you don't see nothin' diff'rent 'bout Pap from what he useter be, do yeh, Nat?" she asked, her dark eyes searching the other's face. In sheer humanity Burke had to assure her that Darnell was as whole as ever, unchanged.

When the great day at last arrived, being ushered in with that terrific patriotic din and discord which greets all our national anniversaries, blowing of whistles, letting off of firearms, whang-banging of drums, tin pans, or whatever came handiest, a large number of virtuous citizens, like Mr. Burke, who had hoped to celebrate the holiday by sleeping later than usual, were balked of that desire, and got up and dressed in a not at all Harrisonian frame of mind. Nat sauntered about the streets all morning, until sauntering became an impossibility, so closely packed as they were with the twenty thousand odd visitors; he dodged, edged, and elbowed through into the vicinity of DUCEY & Co., where the lower doors and windows were securely shut and locked, as he saw; and looking up, beheld the second-story likewise shut and apparently tenantless; he said to himself that Mrs. Ducey must have carried out her plan in spite of opposition and smiled a little doubtfully. Standing on the curb, he looked towards the State-house yard, and saw every part of the half-finished foundation and the board fence which enclosed the whole jammed with people "hanging on by their eye-teeth," as one of his fellow-clerks, whom he at that moment encountered, vividly described it. The roofs, even the gutters, the front stoops, and balconies, some of them none too stable, of every building as far as he could see either way were being utilized as gallery-seats. High Street seemed to have been cleared for the procession, but there were farm-wagons here and there drawn alongside the foot-walk, filled with chairs, and the fortunate owners thereof were handing about cider, doughnuts, pickles, and other light refreshments amongst themselves and picnicing with immense enjoyment. The horses had all been taken out of these vehicles,

Nathan noted and thought of the Duceys again. Hundreds of people who could not be accommodated were standing as they had stood for hours, in the mud, under the open sky, with the greatest patience and good-humor. Nat and the other clerk, whose name was Harry Kellar, I remember, got across the street somehow, and wormed through the crowd eastward as far as Third Street, where it thinned out a little, and walked down to Long and so back to High again. And here Kellar, who was an adventurous youth, clambered over an area-railing and gained a window-ledge where, clinging like ivy on the wall, he proclaimed the outlook superb. "Come on up, Nat, you can see all over!" The latter, however, had already contracted for a seat with a speculator who had arranged a board across from one pair of steps to another, ingeniously wedging between the mighty mud-scrapers which invariably adorned every front entrance in those days; and Burke, having established himself thereon, took the speculator — who was in the neighborhood of eleven years old, an energetic, freckled youngster — on his knees, so that the rest of the room could be let out to a gaunt, sallow young man, Mr. James Sharpless, in fact — Nat knew him at once in his worn, old coat. Observing him to take off his hat, with his curiously brilliant smile, to some acquaintance in the street, Burke followed the gesture and saw it was addressed to a high, shining buggy drawn up, with empty shafts, by the pavement close at hand; the man in it Nathan knew by sight; there was also a very pretty girl with auburn hair under a fashionable little bonnet.

"Look out, mister, here they come!" shrilled the boy in his lap. Both of the young men scrambled upright on their precarious perch, and Sharpless, nodding across at the other, said, "Give the little fellow a hand up and he can sit on our shoulders," which was done accordingly. They were coming, sure enough. A distant martial blare announced it; the "Hero of Tippecanoe" was being sung and trumpeted with tremendous vigor; hats went in the air; there was cheering. Presently Nat's friend, the eagle, came borne aloft, grim and obdurate. Then a band. A military company from Zanesville. Another band. A handsome white horse with a saddle and housings of red velvet fringed with silver, led by a groom in buff-and-blue livery.

"Looky, looky! That's Washington's horse — George Washington's horse!" screamed the urchin on their shoulders, drumming with his heels on Burke's chest.

"How remarkably well preserved!" ejaculated Sharpless. "And doesn't it look like Jabez Cushman's horse that he lends for all the Mason's funerals, though!"

"That ain't Washington's *horse*, mister," said a man in front of them, pityingly; "it's just Washington's *saddle*. They sent down to Marietta for it; it belongs to somebody down there — kind of an heirloom, I guess. But *Washington*, you know, why, he died before I was born. And a *horse*, why, a *horse* don't live as long as a *man*. You see that couldn't be Washington's *horse*."

"Dear me, you don't say! I — I wish you'd repeat that statement, please," said Sharpless, anxiously, feeling for and bringing out a note-book and pencil; "that's not Washington's saddle, you say? It's Washington's *horse* — I'd like to get this straight if you don't mind — I write for the paper — Washington's *horse*."

"No, no, I say *'tain't* Washington's horse, it's Washington's *saddle*."

"Hey? Did you say horse or saddle?" shouted Sharpless, elevating his voice above the roar of an approaching band.

"*No!* SADDLE — WASHINGTON'S SADDLE!"

"I know it's a saddle. I say WHO'S SADDLE?"

"WASHING — Aw, think you're smart, don't you?"

The band — it was the band of the Harrison Guards — drowned out this lively argument; the Guards, augmented, no doubt, by any number of young gentlemen in respectable society, drew near, passed, went on. "They'd orter space them bands further apart," said a woman bystander; "the tunes git all mixed up. Good land o' love! Look at th' wagon with a lot of dirt 'n' stones on it, 'n' a man with a plough 'n' a horse harnessed up. See th' man, Bennie? See horsey! Look at th' horsey! Who is it, anyhow, d'ye s'pose?"

Another spectator volunteered the information that it was the FARMER OF NORTH BEND; it had a label on it to that effect. "Why, that ain't *him*, is it? Harrison, I mean?" she asked in tones of awe. Her neighbor guessed not; he guessed it was just some fellow dressed up to look like Harrison.

"Oh-oh-ee! Looky, looky! Look what's coming!" shrieked the look-out, ecstatically; "it's a ship, it's a *ship!*"

"See here, you want to hold still, son," Sharpless cautioned him, trying to gather the lad's legs into his grasp. "By George, you've got as many feet as a centipede — I never saw a boy with so many feet!"

"Look at the ship! And look at the big boat behind with the band in, and — oh, cricky, watch those horses!"

The Cuyahoga brig, in fact, was passing at this moment, full-rigged, shaking to the top of its masts with every movement of its platform, with a crew who, in manner at least, fully carried out the landsman's conception of Jack ashore; more than half of them were gloriously drunk, and getting drunker. On the next float was a band in a canoe filled with "pioneers," with an Indian in full war-panoply at the stern — a fearsome figure. "Is it a real Injun, do you guess?" asked the woman. The man didn't know; he suspicioned it might be; it was making enough noise for a dozen Injuns, anyhow. Which was quite true, as the Indian's standard of histrionic realism required him to emit a terrifying whoop from time to time, and brandish his tomahawk in a murderous style.

"There's houses coming — little houses with chimnies, an' a man with a gun setting right in the door!" announced the boy, gleefully — and again: "Oh, cricky!" he screamed; "see those horses!"

Nathan looked. "Here, get down, boy!" he said, and shifted the youngster bodily to the plank, and jumped down himself, and started for the street. He had almost to fight his way through.

The horses drawing some of the floats had not been behaving well, although they seemed to be for the most part sedate beasts, and had probably been in training for the day. But it was not in horse flesh-and-blood to accept the racket peaceably; the canoe-driver just passed by was having trouble with his team; and out of the corner of his eye Nat saw the pole-horse of the float carrying Darnell's cabin plunging and backing. It was a sorrel with white fore legs. The band was playing "Old Rosin-the-Bow."

At the first, Burke was not thinking at all about the floats, but of the Ducey carriage and black and bay pair of horses

he had so often driven. He could not tell how long they had been there at the corner, but it could not have been from the first, or he would have seen them before this.[1] The scared people were crowding back in every direction, shouting and screaming. In the carriage were Mrs. Ducey and Francie, and two or three others, ladies, children — I cannot remember who. Ducey was not with them; it was George driving. Everything happened quickly — almost at once. Burke got through the crowd somehow, and ran up and seized hold of the bridle of the bay, and tried to force them back and to one side; he spoke to them; the horses were both quite frantic, rearing, a whirl of flying hoofs. He heard Francie or some one in the carriage scream out: "Nathan, Nathan! Oh, he'll be killed, he'll be killed!" George Ducey was standing up in the front seat, clutching the reins and slashing the horses across the back with a whip, and crying out in a wild way; I believe he was beside himself with fright, and did not know what he was doing. The driver of the log-cabin float, struggling with his own scared team, bawled furiously: "God damn you, drop that whip, you damn fool! Somebody hit him over the head, will you —!" and more oaths. The float was almost on us.

Nat saw Darnell's face in the cabin-door above him, vacantly smiling. "Get back, Jake, for God's sake, get back!" he cried and clung desperately to the bridles. George — I think it was George — all at once gave a horrible kind of screech, and threw the reins aside, and plunged over the wheels into the crowd. The flying buckle of the reins struck Nathan on the forehead and cut to the bone and the blood ran down. It blinded him for a second; I do not know whether the pole of the carriage struck Darnell first, or the horses' hoofs — maybe it was both together. He was flung from his place and down into the mud, and tried to rise; and went down again, and the hind wheels of the float went over him — over his neck. He was dead before any of us got to him.

[1] According to the coroner's report, the carriage had been standing around the corner on the other street from the beginning. It was the backing or lunging of the horses that brought it into Burke's view; for further particulars of this distressing accident the reader is referred to the *Ohio State Journal* for February 23–25, 1840. — M. S. W.

CHAPTER XI

In which Nance begins the World

When this thing happened, there arose from the crowd a dreadful shuddering groan, and a scream here and there. The procession was still coming on, the bands blaring and people cheering up the street. It halted, recoiling on itself, in a moment; but I dare say there were hundreds who did not know until the next day, perhaps, when the papers came out, what it was that had blocked the way. Nathan who was a little dazed, clutching at the horses' bits, all at once found that they were standing quite still, trembling and glaring; and a dozen men were at the traces. The Indian who had been war-whooping in the stern of the canoe jumped down and came running up to us: "What is it? Was that fellow hurt?" he panted. And then looking down — "My God!" he said. Some men were lifting up Darnell's body. "Bring a shutter here, some of you!" the Indian shouted. He was very active and helpful — I never found out his name. Mrs. Ducey stood up in the carriage and called, "George! George!" looking wildly around. Nat felt some one take him by the arm and draw him aside while the horses were being led away; one of them had a bad gash in the near fore leg; the pole of the carriage was broken squarely off. "You're hurt — bleeding," said somebody; "where's your handkerchief?" Burke stared at him — "Speaking to me?" he said vacantly, and the other repeated gently, "You're hurt — your forehead's cut open — I'll bind it up if you'll give me your handkerchief — or maybe we can get a rag somewhere — " Nat mechanically brought out his handkerchief and held it to his forehead. "Oh, damn this blood!" he said, as it persistently welled from the cut, in a sudden burst of unreasoning anger; he was a good deal shaken by what he had seen. His friend — it was Sharpless — went to the carriage, where Mrs. Ducey was still standing up and calling her son. "George is right over here, Mrs. Ducey," he said; "he's sick — sick at his stomach,

but he's not hurt — just frightened. He'll be here in a minute. There's somebody gone for your husband. Hasn't the young lady — Miss Blake, isn't it? — hasn't she fainted?" She had indeed and lay senseless across the laps of the scared women. Sharpless got up on the carriage-wheel, and shouted over the people's heads: "Vardaman! John!" he shouted; "let the doctor through here, won't you?" And the doctor, whom Nathan remembered seeing sitting in his buggy with the pretty red-haired girl, finally struggled through the crowd, without any hat and his coat torn.

They had wrenched a door from its hinges, and laid Darnell on it, and Nance was kneeling by it in the mud. She looked in Vardaman's face as the doctor stooped over, feeling and listening; then took off the red shawl she was wearing about her shoulders and spread it over her father's face, and stood up, and some of the men uncovered their heads. Nance did not shed a tear; Mrs. Williams, who was with her, was wailing hysterically, and some of the other women, I believe. The doctor spoke in a low voice, and Darnell's body was lifted up again and carried into one of the houses — a tailor's shop at the corner. By this time a constable or two had come up, and they cleared the way for the bearers. And presently the procession moved on once more; there had been hurrahing and music somewhere all the time.

"What's your name, young man?" one of the policemen said to Nathan; "I'm taking 'em for the coroner, you know," he added in explanation, and entered it in his note-book. "Nathan Burke? All right. And what's yours? I mean you, young fellow. You got the doctor, didn't you?"

"My name's Sharpless, and I didn't do anything — but I saw it all if it's witnesses you want. James Sharpless," repeated the latter hastily, as he passed them with a tumbler of water that he had got from Heaven knows where; he got up on the carriage-step to give it to Francie. Other men were helping the ladies out of the dismantled vehicle; the children were crying dismally; Mr. Ducey had come; and Nat saw the constable interrogating George in another moment.

"I didn't do it, 'twasn't my fault — was it my fault, Ma?" George cried over and over again. He mopped his pale face; he trembled as with an ague; his eyes roved. George had

grown up into a tall, slim boy lately; he was not strong and at the instant looked curiously like a palsied old man. "The horses pulled the reins right out of my hands — I couldn't hold 'em — nobody could have held 'em — nobody, I tell you. The band scared them, or I could have held them. There was a man hanging on to their heads, and I couldn't do anything with 'em as long as he held on. That's what scared 'em. It was his fault. They got frightened when they saw the cabin coming — that's what frightened 'em. That man sitting in the cabin-door he did something that scared 'em — I don't know what — but it was all his fault — you couldn't do anything with the horses. It wasn't my fault — you can't blame me — I didn't do anything —"

"Lord love you, who's saying you did? I ain't asking for anything but your name," said the constable, impatiently. "So scairt you can't tell your own name?"

"I'm not scared — I'm not scared — I — I — my name's Ducey. But you can't put me in jail, you know — it wasn't my fault —"

"I ain't going to jail you. We don't jail people for being scared to death," said the constable, wetting his pencil.

"I wasn't scared, I tell you — the horses pulled the reins right out of my hand — why, everybody saw 'em pull the reins out of my hand. Ma, didn't you see 'em? I wasn't a bit scared —"

"Get him some whiskey, can't you? Anybody got a flask?" said the constable, looking around. Burke had already had the offer of a dozen. "Boy'll have a fit if we don't look out," remarked the officer. "Mr. Ducey, is that you? That your son? Did you see —? Hey? Oh, you weren't here? I'm sorry, I'll have to call your wife and them other ladies, too, I guess, they was all witnesses."

"George, George, come here with us," Mrs. Ducey cried out. "Francie, can you walk, dearie? Oh, William, what shall we do?"

"Is Nathan killed?" said Francie, sitting up with a gray face. "Was Nathan killed?"

"Here he is, here he is," said Sharpless, pushing him forward. And Nat went up to the carriage and took her clammy, little, shaking hand in his. "Why, Francie —"

he began, with a rather ghastly smile, I am afraid. She burst out crying in a wild fashion.

"She'll be all right now. Only get out of this as quick as you can," said the doctor. He had come out of the shop, and been talking to the constable. Somebody brought him his hat, crushed in at the side.

"That poor girl — that poor, pretty, young thing, Doctor, is she in there? It was her father, wasn't it?" cried Mrs. Ducey. "Oh, I'm so sorry — so sorry!" The tears ran down her cheeks. "I'm going in to see her — let me go in to see her — William, how can you? I want to see her!"

"Better not, Mrs. Ducey, I think," said Vardaman, kindly; "you can't do any good, you know. The man is dead — killed instantly, I believe — at least I hope so."

"Oh, I don't believe it — he can't be *dead* — he's just unconscious. I can bring him to — I'm sure I can. He wasn't *under* the wheel, was he? It just slipped — and — and bruised him, didn't it? I know a splendid liniment —"

"There's nothing to be done, Mrs. Ducey," said the doctor, patiently. "I know this is distressing to you, and you want to help all you can, but he's beyond help from any of us."

"Well, but I want to talk to that poor girl — what do you men know about it? I want to see her."

"I know her, Mrs. Ducey," interposed Nathan; "I know her — I'll take a message to her. But let her alone right now. I'll see to her. Hadn't you better get Francie home?"

She looked at him almost blankly. "Oh, it's Nathan Burke — I didn't know you at first. What's the matter with your your head? Were you hurt, too?"

"Nothing, I cut it," Nat told her; "you ought to go home now —"

"No, no — I want to speak to that poor girl first — I want to take her home — William, we must take her home with us —"

"She won't leave her father — and she's with people she knows — friends," said Nathan, soothingly; "you're a stranger, you know, Mrs. Ducey —"

"Do come home, Anne," said Ducey, nervously.

"I'll see about Nance — I'll take care of her," Burke reiterated; "look at George. He'll be sick if you don't take him away from here —"

"That blood on your head is disgusting," said George, faintly. "Why don't you tie it up so it won't show?"

And in the meanwhile we had been urging them all steadily away from the spot, Mrs. Ducey moving readily enough when told that George needed it. Sharpless and the doctor had Francie between them. Nathan carried in his arms a stout little boy of five or six who roared with terror, and partly also with rage at being thus forcibly deported, half the way home; I hardly know how we got there at last. Mr. Marsh, to whom somebody had taken word, came hurrying up just as we reached the house.

"You'll tell that poor girl I want to see her? You'll tell her, Nathan?" said Mrs. Ducey, earnestly, as they parted. Nathan promised that he would. He thought that her impulsive sympathy, if it did not wear itself out before she saw Nance, might, perhaps, comfort the girl; Mrs. Ducey's kindness was as domineering as all her other traits of character; she could be unreasonably and masterfully tender; but that might be what Nance needed, for all Nat could tell.

"You'd better come around to my office and let me see that head, sir," said the doctor; "you've got a pretty nasty-looking cut there. Come this evening. I don't think you could get to it now." As he hurried off, Nathan heard him say to Sharpless with a concerned look, "I left Louise — Miss Gwynne, I mean, sitting in the buggy all by herself — I couldn't very well help it."

This, as nearly as I remember it, was the exact order of events on that melancholy Washington's Birthday forty years ago. Yet I have a much more vivid and detailed recollection of it than I have been able to put on paper somehow; it was a task from which flesh and spirit recoiled. Burke was not an emotional nor imaginative man, but for a long while afterwards he saw in dreams — waking drenched in horror — a Juggernaut car, monstrous, inexorably impelled, crushing out a life at his feet. Darnell had been sitting, cross-legged, on a but-end of log within the door with his gun and (alas!) his whiskey bottle between his knees, just as Nathan remembered him hundreds of times by their evening camp-fires. A lump came into the young man's throat as he thought of it. Perhaps Jake's sorry life deserved

as sorry an end; but the miserable fitness of it stung one with a deeper pity. I have known in my life worse men than Jake Darnell, who did not have half his faults. And if he did not walk so well as he might, even by his feeble taper — my friends, which of us goes without stumbling?

Nathan, with his head already swollen and throbbing famously, went back to the tailor's shop and found two or three men in charge, homely Samaritans. They had the body decently disposed on one of the tailor's benches, until a coffin should be got ready, which, of course, could not be done until the next day, the town being in such festivity. "You couldn't git a carpenter, fer love ner money, y'know — 'specially fer to make a *coffin*," one of them explained to Burke. "Well, I dunno as there's anybody kin afford to wait better'n a dead person," he added with a meditative glance at the shrouded figure on the bench. "Hev' a drink, mister?" And Nat declining, he took one himself and wiped his mouth on the back of his hand as he set the jug down. The watchers were philosophic souls; they had a table spread and a bottle or two and a greasy pack of cards in the back part of the establishment, and proposed to make a comfortable night of it. The short February afternoon was already closing in, and the procession was at last over; the hurrahing was over; the crowds were dissolving; Nat felt as if he had lived an age since morning. Asking for Nance, he heard with relief that the tailor's wife had taken her under protection, when the Williams family were obliged to start home. And the tailor — they were Germans by the name of Lauterbach — living over his shop, Burke went upstairs and found the family, kind, slatternly people, the tailor a shrivelled, meagre man and his wife very fat and sentimental, weepingly pressing a glass of beer on Nance as the girl sat upright in a corner.

"Ach, so haf she set — so she haf been since —" said the tailoress, making an expressive gesture with her inverted thumb to the floor below. "You also haf a hurt by your head got?" Nathan went and sat down by Nance and took her passive hand. She looked at him with her big black eyes, and the young man was struck as often before by something inscrutable in their glance or in the girl herself; she might have been a young sphinx in her corner, grave and tranquil.

There was a kind of pagan serenity in her self-control, a resignation not expressed by any creed.

"It's all right, Nat," she said quite composedly; "I don't feel like cryin' 'bout Pap. I reckon he'd lived his time. I jest want to set still an' think about him."

"I wish he could have died some other way, Nance," said Burke. The commonplaces of condolence did not come fluently to him; he was more moved by horror and compassion than by sorrow for the dead man, and, whether kindly or not, could say no more than he felt. "You — you didn't see it, did you?"

She said no, not all of it. She had seen her father fall, but not — not the rest; and she asked with a painful earnestness if he thought Darnell had suffered.

"The doctor said not," Nat told her, and seeing relief in her face, went on. "He said he must have died instantly. I — I don't believe he even knew he was in danger, Nance," said the young fellow, not realizing until the words were out that he was bunglingly revealing a conviction he had meant in humanity to keep to himself.

"Yes. I know. Pap was drunk," Nance assented. "I couldn't keep him from it, ye know."

"I — I didn't mean —"

"Never mind, Nat," she said gently, "I knew you knew. 'Twan't no use tryin' to hide it. We've all got to git up an' tell what we know at th' inquest, ain't we? Truth can't hurt Pap now; nor it couldn't while he was alive even. Truth's truth. 'Tain't noways so shameful a man sh'd drink, anyhow. But if 'twas, th' shame's in doin' th' thing — 'tain't in havin' folks know 'bout it, seems to me." And with this piece of sound philosophy, she fell silent again, brooding.

"I want him buried with his ol' rifle — they's a corner in th' cabin-lot at home that he'd like, I know," she said after a while in answer to a question; "mebbe 'tain't Christian, but I kinder 'low Pap would lay easier with that rifle — like Injuns do, ye know, Nathan. I ain't hardly ever seen Pap without his gun — seems to be a part of him, somehow. I — I reckon ye kin make th' city-folks understan' that, can't ye? An' he wouldn't want to be in no spruced-up graveyard, ye know; he'd ruther lay out in th' woods, like he lived."

Burke understood her feeling; to him, too, it seemed as if the old backwoodsman would be better, even in death, removed from the settlements which in life he had shunned or visited only to his undoing. Nat undertook to make all these arrangements. "Th' folks here are mighty kind — mighty kind and good," Nance said with a weary glance at the half-closed door, where two or three of the Lauterbach youngsters were peeping through a crack at us. Mrs. Lauterbach had shooed them all out of the room, together with herself and the tailor, in deference to the mourners' conference. "They're jest as kind as they know how — but they don't know much," said the girl. And then she asked with some appearance of interest: "Nathan, that was that little skunk of a George Ducey drivin' that carriage, wasn't it? Th' one you brought out home one time, tryin' to learn him to shoot, don't you rec'lect? I was sure I knowed him — I didn't see none of th' others — they was wimmen 'n' children, wasn't they?"

"Yes, that was George. But he's not — that is, he's nothing but a boy, and he was frightened, you know, Nance — he didn't know what he was doing," Nat explained, noting with surprise the scorn in her tone.

Nance shook her head. "Don't know why you stand up fer him," she said. "That boy ain't got any grit, Nat — you *know* it. Ef it had 'a' been his own mother settin' in Pap's place, he'd acted jest th' same. He ain't got any grit, an' he ain't got any too much sense, either. You kin git along 'thout grit, Pap useter say, an' you kin git along 'thout sense, but ye can't git along 'thout ary one or t'other of 'em. Pap never took no stock in that boy — my, I remember him laughin' fit to kill himself over you tryin' an' tryin' to learn that little George how to shoot. An' to think that very boy sh'd be th' one to kinder help along Pap's dyin' in th' end." A passing wonder at this uncalled-for and gratuitous irony of fortune showed in her face.

Nathan could not deny the charge. If George had kept his head, the tragedy might not have occurred. Yet, in fairness, the boy could not be blamed. Nor, for that matter, did Nance seem disposed to blame him overmuch; she recognized her own responsibility. There was a sanity and balance about the girl, even in a calamity whose horrid circum-

stances might well have undermined her, that commanded respect. Not stoicism but a brave reasonableness governed her. Only once did she flash into one of those unaccountable outbursts which Nathan remembered so well; it was when he told her about Mrs. Ducey.

"Did she say that, Nat? Did she, did she?" Nance cried out. The color flared in her white face; her eyes burned with that curious reverence, that very slavery of admiration which Mrs. Ducey — or whatever extraordinary character Mrs. Ducey assumed in Nance's own transfiguring vision — always aroused in her. "Did she really an' truly want to come an' see me, Nat? Did she want to take me to her home?" She gazed at him, with parted lips, ecstatically.

"Yes, but we — I — I wouldn't let her, you know, Nance," said Nathan, guiltily, feeling that he had made a mistake. "I thought maybe you wouldn't —"

"Oh, Nathan, I'd do anything for her, I'd go anywhere she said!"

The tailor's wife let Nat out, and lighted him down the rickety stair, wiping her lips, with a baby grasping a half-eaten sausage over her fat shoulder; and with many sympathetic sighs and ejaculations about "Du lieber Gott," and the "schone madchen" — "you are — vot it iss you say? — versprecht, hein? to be married, so?" she asked eagerly. And Mr. Burke, who knew — and knows — no German, had some trouble to make her understand that such was not the case; he left her benevolently smiling, still unconvinced.

To tell the truth, the question of Nance's future had already begun to occupy Burke's mind. Darnell's death left her absolutely alone in the world; Nat himself knew what that solitary estate meant, and he did not need to be told how much worse it would be for a woman than for a man. He held that he had promised her father to take care of Nance; even if he had not, it would be the least he could do for the sake of auld lang syne and the countless good turns poor old Jake had done him. The most acceptable solution was probably the one she herself would furnish; to go back to the country and the farm where her father had squatted and built, and live there — and doubtless, Nathan reflected, speedily marry some young man of the neighborhood. Or,

perhaps, to take refuge with the Williamses or any other family thereabouts, a thing which was often done, but did not seem practicable somehow with a girl of Nance's temperament, any more than going out to service here in town, another alternative which occurred to Nathan. This was no time, with her father still lying unburied, to talk to her about ways and means, however — let to-morrow, for the moment, at least, take care of itself, he thought.

The streets were still crowded with people, the taverns receiving and discharging scores of patrons, the bands going full-blast in the State-house yard, turn by turn. Nat stalked through the riot with his aching head, and if he had been given to moralizing, might, I daresay, have delivered a very pretty sermon on the hideous shifts and contrasts of human life — something which, in fact, the Reverend Mr. Sharpless did that ensuing Sunday, and greatly edified his large congregation, a few of whom had been witnesses to the awful occurrence which he used in illustration. There was a light in the doctor's office, which one reached by a stair clinging to the outside of a frame building that stood about midway of the square between High and Third; there was a grocery store in the lower story, I remember — it's all gone long ago, and a theatre has been built over the place. Burke, who was in pretty stout health all his younger days, had never had occasion to visit a physician before; he mounted the stair and found Vardaman sitting rather gloomily, with folded arms, in the bare little room, enveloped in clouds of tobacco-smoke. He knocked out his pipe — which was an odd and beautiful foreign-looking instrument of a delicate ivory color with a female head and bust elaborately executed thereon, the first meerschaum, in fact, which Burke had ever seen, and he eyed it with corresponding interest — the doctor knocked out his pipe with hardly a word and began operations.

"It will make a slight scar — we let it go a little too long," he said after he had set in a stitch or two, and washed and bound up the wound, "however, that won't spoil your beauty much — you're lucky to get off so easily. A little more towards the temple and I fear, sir, there would have been a dead —?" he paused in the act of drying his hands on a very large, clean, white towel, and surveyed Nathan keenly

and rather whimsically — "a dead lawyer? a dead doctor — ?"

"Neither one — a dead bookkeeper," said Nat, grinning; "an accountant with Mr. Marsh — I mean with DUCEY & COMPANY —" he added hastily.

The doctor, who was a man some six or eight years Burke's senior, with a lean, harsh-featured face, eyed him again, "I *thought* I remembered seeing you before somewhere," he said; "it must have been at Mr. Marsh's — at DUCEY & COMPANY'S, I mean, of course," he finished smoothly, with a perfectly grave side-glance.

"That wasn't the first time, though, Doctor Vardaman," said Burke, biting back a smile.

"Not the first time?"

"I don't suppose you remember going out in the country once five or six years ago to patch up a boy that had fallen out of a hay-mow and put his shoulder out of joint?" Nat asked him a little shyly.

Vardaman laid down the pipe, which he had begun to clean preparatory to refilling, and looked at his patient, surprised and interested. "Why, good Lord, yes, I do — I remember it very well now you speak of it. I had forgotten all about it, though," he said frankly. "It was before I went away — went to Leipzig to study," he added, his glance falling on the meerschaum as if it served to remind him. "You were one of my first cases — I'd only been studying a couple of years then." He went over and felt Nathan's shoulder critically.

"It was a good job," Burke assured him, laughing. And as they stood, they heard a foot on the stair, and, without any ceremony of knocking, in walked young Sharpless. "Hello, Jack, I —" he began, and stopped short upon seeing the other.

"Don't you know this young man, Jim? I thought you knew him," said the doctor.

"Oh, yes, we've met," Sharpless said, and with his odd, illuminating smile he went up and shook Burke's hand.

CHAPTER XII

The Mail-Bag

Mrs. William Ducey to
Mrs. Cornelia Marsh at
Chenonville, Avoyelles Parish, La. (No date)

My dearest Mother:

Well I suppose you have been wondering what has become of us all this long while but I have simply been too busy to write and then all kinds of things have been happening. At first I thought maybe I'd better not tell you for fear of worrying you but that didn't seem quite right somehow and I never did believe in keeping people in ignorance that way so I may as well come right out flat and say that we nearly had an aweful accident and it's a blessing and a mercy we aren't all dead this minute. Nobody that is none of the family was even scratched though so you must not get frightened.

It was on Washington's Birthday when we all went to see the Log-Cabin parade they gave here in the grand Whig Rally, you know. They've had them all over the country so I suppose maybe you had one too. You never saw anything like this town for the whole week before crowded to the very roofs and some people they say sleeping in the streets all night.

When we first heard about the procession I wanted to go down and look at it from the room over the store but Uncle George was *so disagreeable* and plainly didn't want us there that I quietly gave it up without having any fuss with him of course nor any argument. Uncle George is really getting to be a very old man and never was easy to get along with as you know. I can tell by the way William acts that he leads them a life at the store and William simply *will not* assert himself he has such an idea of being respectful to Uncle George. He can't get over the feeling that he is under obligations to Uncle George when goodness knows there's not

another man in the world who would put up with poor old Uncle George a minute. And as to *obligations* it seems to me Uncle George *owes us* something for the way he treated you when Pa died. I have heard you say though that it was always dreadfully hard for Pa to stand him so you can imagine what it's like now and especially as his age is making Uncle George more *cantankerous* than ever.

However as I say I didn't have any words with him it's so much better to be calm and firm and not *squabble*. I just made up my mind to take our party in the carriage and drive down to the corner of Long and High and see the procession from the carriage. Just to show you how *contrary* Uncle George has grown to be the minute he heard about it he began to grumble again! The trouble with him was he had gotten it into his head that we oughtn't to see it at all on account of the crowds or something and I suppose there *were* some disreputable people among them but what difference did that make to us? But nothing would have satisfied him but for me to say Well we'll stay at home. I just went on and made arrangements without bothering about him any more. Nina Clarke was staying here, and I invited Mrs. Hunter and Jennie she's just Francie's age and they are the greatest friends and that with Nina and myself just filled the carriage with George driving because of course we didn't want to give up a seat to Joseph the hired man you know he's not a very good driver anyhow and George is *splendid* the best I ever saw. He understands horses thoroughly and isn't afraid of anything don't you remember how wonderfully he used to ride his little pony? William went up to the Neil House with a party of friends. He would have come with us but those were some men he had to entertain the town has been full of visitors. We drove down to the corner and there was a perfect jam. The other people in carriages had had their horses taken out but I knew ours were safe only I think Joseph must have fed them something that morning that disagreed with them and made them fractious George says he is sure of it because they began to prance the minute they heard the first band. And then ever so many people were yelling and waving their hats and handkerchiefs right under our horses' noses wouldn't you think they might have had better sense because the people standing around so close were

in much more danger from the horses than we were whenever they began to cut up. Anyway in about ten minutes there came along one of those huge floats with a *boat* on it life-size full of men and behind it another with a brass band playing like fury and then one of the Log-Cabins on a float all to itself. And when the horses saw that they just stood right straight up on their hind legs! Georgie was as cool and collected as could be he told me afterwards his heart didn't even go one beat faster I tell you mine did. He just stood up and took the whip to them and called out in an encouraging and soothing voice but the people were screaming so I suppose the horses couldn't hear him. And then while they were prancing and before he could get them quieted along came the Log-Cabin float and an old drunken man sitting in the doorway and I suppose he got frightened seeing the horses so close and he fell right out and rolled under the wheels and broke his neck wasn't it awful?

I kind of feel as if it were partly our fault because of course it was our horses but William says for me not to worry. I couldn't have helped it. And I am sure we all did our best. The reins got jerked out of George's hands somehow and he had to jump out and was going to run up and grab the horses' bits but before he could get there it was all over and the man was killed. George was terribly shocked so he couldn't get out of bed to go and testify before the coroner the next day but they came and took what they call a sworn statement from all of us and he told them just how it happened as he lay in bed.

We were all awfully scared and Francie fainted dead away. But there were a whole lot of men around in a minute and Jim Sharpless and Doctor Vardaman came and helped us out and you ought to have seen that smart little Jennie Hunter fanning Francie and wetting her forehead and doing everything to bring her around just as capable and managing like a little woman! They sent for William and we all got home somehow. I'll never want to see another procession if I live to be a hundred. They picked the poor old drunken man up and took him away somewhere but Ma you never saw anything like the girl that was with him his daughter. She's a perfect beauty tall with one of those rich olive complexions and lovely features and great black eyes only about eighteen

or nineteen years old I think with the most graceful figure like a statue although she hadn't on a sign of corsets or hoops. She looked just like that beautiful steel-engraving of the "Gypsy Queen" in the front of that "Flowers-of-Loveliness" Annual book William gave me last New Year's. It's the book with the red cover all over gilt scrolls I have on the centre-table in the parlor. I never saw such a magnificent looking creature as she was as she stood by her father's body. I just couldn't get her out of my head I thought about her all night. They wouldn't let me speak to her at the time but I found out all about her from Nathan Burke who knows her it seems. Her father's name was Darnell and hers is Nance and Nathan told me they were children together up at the farm on the Scioto where he comes from. I went down and had a talk with Nathan at the store and asked all about her. He said her mother died long ago like his own parents and Darnell was very good to him when he was a little fellow he said he and Nance were just like brother and sister. She was staying with the people where they took her father's body named Lauterbach (Germans) a tailor. So I said Nathan I want you to take me straight there now the inquest is over before she goes away or they do anything. I want to see that poor girl and what is she going to do now her father is dead do you know? He looked worried and said he didn't know and perhaps it would be better to wait until Darnell was buried before asking her any questions like that he thought she had enough to distress her right now. But I said Yes that's very well meant but it's a mistaken kindness. Our duty is to the living first not to the dead, and after all I daresay when she thinks about how drunk he was all the time, she feels that his death is maybe the best thing that could have happened. The right thing to do would be to find out what plans she has made and whether we can help her. He said he didn't think Nance could possibly have made any plans yet. Well then I just told him I can help her that very way. I've had so much experience and I'm very good at planning and directing everybody that's ever known me has always noticed it. And I *know* I could help her. And besides I feel a kind of responsibility about her on account of the way her father was killed. It's a terrible thing for a young girl like that to be left alone in the world without any

father or mother because with a girl of her class it's a real misfortune to be so pretty. So he gave in at last and said he supposed women knew more about each other even when they were strangers than any man could and so he went with me and left me there because he had to go right back to the store. I wish you could see Nathan Ma he's so much improved and talks and acts just like a man you know he always was rather an *old* acting boy. William says he's a very fair clerk and steady the way he always used to be.

Well the Lauterbach place was perfectly *awful* knee-deep in dirt and swarming with children and I had to tell the tailor-woman Mrs. Lauterbach to wash off a chair before I could sit down on it. But really that poor Darnell girl was just as beautiful as ever even in that horrid hole and *so* sweet when I said I don't see how you can stand this nasty place she said They're very good to me. As if anybody wouldn't be good to her the poor young thing. It was exactly as Nathan said she hadn't an idea in her head about what she was going to do next. They are going to bury her father out there in the backwoods and she said Nathan had seen to everything and would help her take the body out. But when I said Why my poor child you haven't got any mourning have you? she looked kind of bewildered and wanted to know what that was? So I told her she must have some kind of black dress and bonnet she said Pap likes me in red just as though he were in the next room and could see her. I told her I'd get her some black things and if they didn't fit we could alter them afterwards. And then I just went on and told her what I'd planned out for her. I wanted her to come and live with me and I'd teach her to do fine sewing and be upstairs-girl and a sort of maid you know Ma and she'd have a good home of course not very much wages at first because she would have to be taught so much but I know she will learn soon and like it and be happy and above all protected. You see Ma I had thought it all out and made up my mind before I went to see her because I knew she couldn't possibly do anything that would be better and I'm such a judge of girls with all the experience I've had I know a good one when I see one. I've always had to teach them more or less and sometimes pay them just as high wages as if they knew everything but of course Nance won't expect that so that it will be a wise arrangement all

around. As soon as I've got that frightful glaring red dress off of her and put her in a neat black and-white dotted calico with an apron and taught her a few things she'll be the best girl we ever had and certainly it will be nice to have somebody around that is so pretty to look at. The last one had just a few old snags of teeth left tho' she was a young woman and *was* so slatternly. Just now I haven't anybody but a woman who comes in by the day and you know that is always so expensive altho' William never says a word. I wouldn't mind if one could only get a little work out of them but this one makes a dreadful fuss every time we have company and Francie and I have to make all the beds and do the dusting. I shall feel *fixed* for life when Nance comes she's just the kind to stay with us forever I know she's so appreciative. When I told her the plan the poor thing was so happy and grateful it was touching. She kept saying You want me to come and live with you You want me to come and live with you over and over again and looked at me as if I were an angel from Heaven. We settled it right then and there and she is to come as soon as her father is buried and she has packed up what things she wants from their cabin. I expect she hasn't got a great deal. She doesn't even know whether the farm they lived on was their own her father just squatted there and I guess he didn't do much farming only fished and hunted when he was sober enough to. She can read and write she says.

William says it's a splendid plan but then he hardly ever finds fault with any of my plans and you know yourself Ma I seldom make mistakes. But what do you think happened? I really want to tell you this for it's a good story and a kind of a joke. After supper that evening who should turn up but Nathan Burke! And looking very much like a gentleman too I told him so because I knew it would please him and he colored up like anything so I could see he was perfectly delighted. He had on nice clothes and you know he has rather high thin features and always did keep his teeth so clean and white and has a clean looking skin. But when I saw him at first I was dumbfounded for it hardly seemed possible that he could have come to *make a call* — not that it wouldn't be all right of course but you know one can't quite forget that after all he was our hired man and not so very long ago

either. The minute I saw him I thought Good Gracious he can't have come to see Francie! She's getting to that age and has spindled up like everything this last few months you'll hardly know her. However it seemed Nathan hadn't come to see her altho' he spoke to her of course when he came in but after we sat down he began on me right away without any beating about the bush Mrs. Ducey is this true what Nance tells me that she is coming here to live? I said Yes. Well then he said On what footing? What will she be? I haven't been able to make out from what she says? Why Nathan I said it's just as simple as can be no mystery about it at all and I told him the whole thing. He listened without once interrupting or saying a solitary word. But after I got thro' he began Ma and he *talked* and *talked!* I'm sure I never expected to hear him do so much talking. He said he was quite certain Nance didn't understand in the least what I wanted of her that she knew nothing whatever about ladies' maids or working out or how people lived in town. And he didn't believe I could train her the way I wanted she *wouldn't* be a servant and she *couldn't* be a companion. He said he knew her thoroughly and she wasn't fitted by nature for any such position and the experiment wouldn't be fair to either one of us. He said You know Mrs. Ducey in everything that *matters* in all the important things you and Nance would both do what was right and perhaps sacrifice yourselves and your own feelings without a murmur but it's the little every-day things that count when people live together in the same house and that make life easy or hard. And when you think how differently you and Nance have been brought up and what different ways you must have of looking at things it's not to be expected that you could get along together.

Did you *ever* Ma? That's the first time I was ever told I had such a disposition I couldn't get along with *anybody.* And by Nathan too of all people in the world! Of course he didn't say it in so many words but anyone could see that that was what he meant. He just judges of course like any other *man* by the times I have to change servants. But anyone that lived in my house two weeks would know that that wasn't *my* fault. It's these horrid girls we have to employ. Anyhow I said to him Well Nathan I never expected to hear you preaching at this rate. He said he knew that he took a

great deal on himself to interfere but that her father had once said something to him about taking care of Nance and he could not stand by and see us go into this plan without telling us what he thought about it and he had talked to Nance and tried to persuade her out of it. So then I said Well what do you want her to do Nathan let's hear *your* plan of course it's a great deal better. He said flat he hadn't any. I said Well it's a deal easier to tell people what *not* to do than what *to* do it seems. I'd think up something better for Nance if I were in your place before I came here and raised all these objections. He said no doubt I was perfectly right nevertheless he thought neither one of us understood what we were doing and that he ought to tell us. Why I said Nathan you talk as if Nance wasn't going to be happy here when I'm doing everything I can to give her a good home and make her happy. He said you know Mrs. Ducey people would generally rather be unhappy their own way than happy in somebody else's.

Well I can't remember all the argument I've only given you an outline of it here but I *stood firm*. I don't lay claim to many virtues but there is one thing I know I've got and that is *strength of character*. All our family have *that*. I *know* when I'm *right*. So Nathan at last went away and Nance is coming just the same. His persistance was so queer I couldn't imagine why he took the whole business so much to heart but when Georgie heard about it he put his finger right on the root of it at once. You know he is very quick and sometimes alarms me with his keen judgments I think it's a little unnatural at his age. He said Why I shouldn't wonder if Nathan was in love with that Darnell girl and he don't like to think of her being our servant tho' he was himself. That would be just like him. Why I said of *course* I don't know why I didn't think of that before. She's a beautiful girl and that accounts for all his earnestness. But why don't he marry her and be done with it? George said he guessed he couldn't afford to be married yet. And then Francie burst out in the most furious way that we didn't either of us know a thing about it and that Nathan was *not* ashamed of having been our hired man he was *above* it and he was *not* in love with the Darnell girl and if he was it was none of our business and then she got so excited and crying I had to send

her to bed. I told her for form's sake that she must apologize to me for being so rude but you know Ma she never will and I'll just have to pass it over. She's nothing but a child and got into a temper about nothing. I'm a little afraid for Francie's disposition anyhow she seems so stubborn. I don't know where she gets it. Dear Sister Connie was always the sweetest gentlest creature on earth and gave in to everybody except that one time when you refused to let her marry Francis and she shut herself in her room and wouldn't eat anything nor speak to anybody and got us all so frightened and then ran away after all.

I must close this terrific long letter. I don't know whether you can read some of the pages where I've crossed them. Love to everybody from

Your devoted child ANNE.

Mrs. William Ducey to
Mrs. Stevenson Desha at
Frankfort, Ky.

May 21, 184–

MY DEAR LITTLE SISTER BETTY,

Ma arrived safe and sound and looking better than I ever saw her which speaks volumes for your Kentucky fried chicken and hoe-cake. I wish I had some this minute. Letty Baker and the children came with her but they won't be here long as Mr. Baker is coming to take them East to visit his mother and we'll be alone again in a couple of weeks. I am rather glad for once as we are a little upset in the kitchen department and that girl I told you about the one I took to train is not much good there. She seems willing but she is rather dull and has fits of the sulks from time to time. And then whenever she's had one of her tantrums she comes crying like everything and begging my pardon in the most awful tragic way as if she had killed somebody so that it gets my nerves all on edge. However I am going to peg along and see if I can't civilize her in time.

You seemed so surprised to hear that Georgie was at home but he has been ever since Christmas I thought you knew it. We sent him to Miami University in the fall you know but I soon saw from his letters that it was no place for him. So when he came home for the holidays we simply had him *stay*

home and none of the professors have ever written to inquire or seemed to care in the least bit which proves what Georgie says that they are all a set of perfect boors no manners and no ideas of the world. He says that is what disgusted him almost from the start. The school is full of a lot of rough young fellows farmer boys and such from all over the country not at all the sort of associates we should select for George who has always had such naturally refined ways. George says you ought to see the style they dress pantaloons tucked into their boots and corduroy pea-jackets some of them. You can see they aren't gentlemen he says. One example will give you an idea. They have some kind of club just started that they call the Beta Theta Pi which is a Hebrew word meaning the *Brothers* George told me when I asked him it's perfectly wonderful what a taste for languages George has nothing's too hard for him he told me Hebrew was quite easy to learn. Well he said to one of the boys in a perfectly polite and gracious way that he would join this club and the boy just turned round and growled as rough as could be Better wait till you're asked! And George says that was the last he ever heard of it so he knows that boy never even mentioned it. The truth is George says there was a great deal of jealousy of him among all the boys in his class and of course that influenced the whole school. It's natural those coarse young men should dislike anybody who is so well-dressed and so much above them in appearance and position to say nothing of his leading his class all the time in studies. We are in hopes it will be different at Kenyon College where we have decided to send him next fall. George is quite a *young man* now going out to *see the girls* every evening. I can scarcely believe that I am the mother of that great tall long-legged thing. He has a latch-key which of itself makes him seem older.

There is not much news here except that the engagement between Louise Gwynne and John Vardaman has been broken off. You know they've been engaged a year it happened last summer when you were here don't you remember? I heard the whole of it from her mother about the quarrel I mean when I was there the other day. It began last winter with a fuss they had at the procession that very day we nearly had such a terrible accident and my hired girl's father was

killed I wrote Ma about it at the time. The doctor had taken Louise down in his buggy to see the parade and then when the accident happened of course he jumped right out and ran to help and left Louise sitting there alone for nearly an hour with the crowd all around and she was perfectly *furious* and would hardly speak to him afterwards and now the engagement's broken. Of course it must have been disagreeable for Louise to be alone there all the while a young girl in such a conspicuous position but dear me nobody had any time to look at *her* and what would she have had the doctor do I'd like to know? Some women are so unreasonable. I told her mother so right out but you never saw anything so silly as Marian Gwynne she's just like a tiger-cat about Louise and you can't find fault with a single thing Louise says or does Marian is right up in arms. She thinks Louise is *perfect*. Of course Louise is an only child and all that Marian has got in the world but my Georgie is an only child too for that matter and we don't spoil him to quite *that* extent. I can't help feeling sorry for Jack Vardaman he's such a nice fellow and all his people were so nice. He has just bought a place out in the country next to Governor Gwynne's and was going to start building their house this summer. I do hope Louise will come around and make it up but it's not likely she hasn't got that red head for nothing. And besides she has a lot of attention from the men and it's sort of turned her head I think. I can't understand what they see in her.

Talking about this makes me think of Mary Sharpless you know she is all the time having a desperate flirtation with somebody Mary will never get too old for that and anyway she's the youngest looking thing you ever saw. Nobody would say she was a day over twenty. Everybody says Mary would be willing to console Doctor Vardaman but he won't give her a chance. You know he has money outside of his practice and money is what Mary's after. It's a horrid thing to say but it's true and somehow I can't blame her. A minister's family always have such a scuffle to get along and never have enough to live on and Jim doesn't help them at all. I see him sometimes on the street and oh Betty it's aweful my heart aches for poor Mrs. Sharpless Jim looks so seedy and disreputable tho' I never saw him drunk but I haven't a doubt he is often. He doesn't live at home any more since

he had that awful quarrel with his father. He has a room in some horrible low place down town and writes for the papers. The trouble was you know he told Doctor Sharpless out and out he *didn't believe there was any God.* Wasn't it terrible? Of course nobody knows what else he said I suppose he don't believe in Heaven or Hell either anyway Mr. Sharpless ordered him out of the house and nobody dares mention Jim before any of them now. The strange thing is to look at Jim you wouldn't believe he was that sort of a man. When we had our accident he came and helped us and was *lovely* I don't care who hears me say it. I went around and told everybody about it afterwards. And someone said to me Why Mrs. Ducey I don't see how you could let that man touch you don't you know he's a blasphemer and an *Atheist!* I just said Why I couldn't help it there were some mighty good Christians standing around there but *they* never *budged.* I never could help liking Jimmie Sharpless I suppose it's a weakness but I forget all about how bad he is and anyway I'm not the only one because they say Doctor Vardaman likes him and has him at the house often and the doctor is a good Episcopalian.

Good-bye with dearest love to all from

Your loving sister

NAN.

Miss Frances Blake to
Mrs. Cornelia Marsh at
Chenonville, Avoyelles Parish, La.

November 12, 1840

MY DEAR GRANDMA,

Aunt Anne is sick in bed with a cold so she says I am to write this time as she doesn't want you to miss hearing from us as usual once a week. The cold began a week ago, but she took some medicine New London Bilious Pills which they say will cure anything; it didn't cure her however and Aunt Anne says she can't understand why people will deliberately advertise and say their medicine will do this, that, and the other when it *doesn't.* The doctor has just been here and says she will be all right in a few days now and she *particularly* wants me to say to you that the cold is not dangerous. While she has been sick I have been running the house, and

Uncle Will says I have done very well. I oughtn't to say *I*, though, because of course Nance helped and wouldn't let anybody wait on Aunt Anne but herself and kept Aunt Anne's room beautifully. George being at college there wasn't so much to do in the house. I am enclosing his last letter to Aunt Anne for you to read and show to the rest of the family, but she says please be sure and return it as she keeps all his letters. They are not going to have George go to college any more after this year. I believe he wants to stay at home and study medicine with Doctor Vardaman.

The elections are all over in this State and I suppose nearly everywhere else, too; I don't see why they don't have them all on the same day in all the States; it takes so long to hear about them this way. They have had an enormous great blackboard in front of a place down town with things like this on it: "New Hampshire goes for Van Buren" "Another Sweeping Harrison Victory! Georgia Whig by 10,000 majority!" It's been there for the whole two weeks while the elections were going on, with men crowded around it half a dozen deep. It's not very nice to go down town but I've had to since Aunt Anne's been sick, and nothing happened to me. One day as I was coming home with a big package I met Mr. Sharpless — not the Reverend Mr. Sharpless, his son, I mean — the same one that was so kind to us when we had all that trouble last winter, and he asked me if he couldn't carry my bundle. Aunt Anne once told me that I could bow to him but I mustn't talk to him, but the way this happened I couldn't very well help it, I just had to let him carry it. We didn't have very far to go anyhow. I told Aunt Anne when I got home. I don't think he has enough to eat and he coughed a good deal. On the way we met Nathan (Nathan Burke, you know) and he said: "Jim, what are you doing out a day like this? Go home and go to bed." And he took the bundle and said he would take care of me the rest of the way. Mr. Sharpless laughed and coughed and said: "Without doubt, Nat, you're more respectable to walk on the street with a young lady. I give up." And looked at me and bowed and went away. So Nathan took me home and I asked him why they said such things about Mr. Sharpless who seems to me to be very nice; and he said: "Because they don't know any better." I asked him if they were friends, and he said "Yes, great

friends ever since we first met." I told him I was sure anybody he liked must be nice, and he laughed a little and then said: "Francie, you are a dear little girl and always were!" And we shook hands at the door. He really ought not to call me a little girl, as I've got on long skirts now because Aunt Anne said I was getting too tall to be in short ones any more. It's because he knows how old I am; Mr. Sharpless behaved exactly as if I were a grown-up young lady. This was the only *adventure* I had going out by myself, and you can see it wasn't a very exciting one.

We are all so glad Mr. Harrison was elected and Mr. Corwin too. I told Uncle George I supposed everything was going to be all right now we had a Whig President at last, and he laughed and said the country was saved for about the tenth time in his recollection.

We sent George a big box for his birthday as he says the things there aren't fit to eat. Perhaps you won't understand one thing he says in his letter about how is *our guest* getting along? He means Nance Darnell, you know. George doesn't like her.

I have to stop writing now and go see about Aunt Anne's supper. With ever so much love,

FRANCIE.

Mr. George Ducey to
Mrs. William Ducey.

Gambier, Ohio,
November 5, 1840.

MY DEAR MOTHER;

I omitted my customery epistle as I was feeling far from well at that time. It was nothing for you to be anxious about however, only a low fever for a few hours at a time with an ocasional prolonged shivering fit acompanied by pains in the back of the head and eyes and an aversion to eating ammounting almost to nausea and some other trifling simptoms. There has been a good deal of typhus fever about here but of course that may have nothing to do in connection with my alements and I do beg and entreat of you not to give it a thought if you miss hearing from me. I don't mean to let myself get sick but if I do I guess I can *pull through* without troubling you. I had to have the doctor of course and the last time he came he said 'Well, Ducey you are a *wonder*. I never in my life saw such *fortatude*. Any other man in your

place would be making his will.' I told him I got it from *my mother* who *never gave up*, and was the *finest* and *strongest* character I ever knew. He said he envied me and wished he could meet you. He is a splendid fellow and a *giant* in his profession, a really remarkable man to be buried in this little out-of-the-way hole which is a perfect extingisher for genius and abillities, college-town though it is.

It is no wonder really that I have an aversion to eating for the table here is something execrable altho' I am at the best boarding-house in town. However I suppose I will get used to it and I want you to understand you are not to worry about me. I mean to get along somehow.

I suppose *your guest* is going on as usual and making the house unpleasant for everybody acording to her habit. If I was in your place I never again would undertake that kind of a charity. It's thrown away. Those country-people are a poor lot physickally and mentally and haven't the faintest idea of loyalty or gratatude. I saw a great deal of them the day I went out hunting with our hired man Nathan What's his-name — I never can remember the fellow's last name. And I assure you they were all *common* to a *degree*.

This old place goes on the same as I wrote you before. The professors, I regret to say, altho' they make a little better apearance than those at Miami are at *heart* exactly the same. They are dull unfinished fellows that couldn't make a success at the Eastern schools so have drifted out here. I can hardly keep up any interest in the lectures or recitations, I suppose because I am rather in advance of my class and the other men of my age. They look at me in perfect wonder; and to be plain don't like it very much. I have been so much amused to see some of the instructors fairly quale and look anxiously around when I came in and took my seat. You see they are afraid I am going to ask questions which they *can't answer* as that has happened several times and nothing takes a professor down so much as to have that happen in class. They just *can't stand it*, and regard me as an enemy. They really don't care to have bright men in their classes. They would a great deal rather have very ordinary pupils who they can lecture and dictate to, and who believe every word they say. I've investigated this college question thoroughly now, and this is my mature judgement.

The people here as is always the way in such places make their living off of the students so that my *very modderate* pocket-money don't go very far. It takes almost all of it for washing, mending, candles, firewood, and ct. However don't worry nor send me any more as with pinching and scrimping I can make out. For instance I can go without a fire except the very bitterest days, and even then I could wrap up in my overcoat as I sit here, and that would be quite a saving. I meant to have a pair of boots re-soled but I guess I can manage without. The only thing is I am a little afraid of catching cold as they are really too thin for this weather, and I don't want to get another of these attacks. But I've got a good constitution and would probably survive it. I'll not deny that I like to apear well-dressed and show these *bumpkins* what a gentleman should look like but even with my small means I look better than any of them. And I have been a good deal surprised to have some of them come up and tell me I had the most polished manners they ever saw. I didn't suppose they would appretiate it.

Now please don't worry about my having so little money or being sick. I shall be delighted to get home for Christmas.

Your devoted son,

GEORGE MARSH DUCEY.

Mrs. William Ducey to
Mrs. Cornelia Marsh.

December 1840

MY DEAR MA,

Your letter has come and thank you so much for returning Georgie's so promptly. Did all the family see it? I knew they would just be fighting to read it George's letters are always so . . . [word illegible]. Oh Mother isn't it *glorious* to have such a son? Do you notice how thoughtful the dear boy is about me and how he struggled to keep back anything he thought might pain me? Wasn't it *noble?* Of course we sent him fifty dollars right away and I am not going to let him go back to that horrid place after New Year's I'm sure the climate and food must be perfectly poisonous. For all he is so brave and patient you can read between the lines and see how he was suffering when he wrote that letter. That accounts for those words misspelled I know his head was burning so he hardly knew what he was writing and I

think its *pathetic* his anxiety to hide it from me. Anyhow he don't need to go to college you can see he has gone farther than any of the teachers and they can't tell him much of real benefit. Doctor Vardaman is crazy for him to come home and go into his office to study medicine. The doctor doesn't *say* much you know but when I suggested it you should have seen his face light up! All he said was, Why, if George has any bent for it certainly Mrs. Ducey I'll take him and give him a trial. Jack Vardaman is always so *careful* and *reticent*. In the meanwhile something very disagreeable has happened. It's a good lesson to me never again to attempt any *reforms*. George was perfectly right as usual in his estimate of the Darnell girl's character. I only wonder why I was so blind for so long. You know I was quite sick with a bad cold the first of the month and poor Francie had to run the house all by herself the child is not in the least to blame as she couldn't be expected to see to everything. I might have suspected something myself when I saw how unnaturally devoted Nance was to me hardly letting anybody go into the room or touch me but herself. Of course this isolation gave her opportunities and I was too sick to notice anything. . . .

(The rest of this letter is missing. The fragment was torn almost in two, and discolored with something like tea or coffee stains. — M. S. W.)

CHAPTER XIII

Which rambles Considerably

In after years Burke used to recall the fruitless effort he made to direct Nance Darnell's career with an ironic melancholy. I am afraid it was a rather priggish and pompous young man — a very young man — with no slight sense of his own importance and the weight of his judgment who went up and laid his adverse arguments before Mrs. Ducey that evening when he found out the ill-starred design she had formed. All that redeemed him was his devout sincerity; he meant well, he thought he was doing his duty. Logic and common sense sustained him (he believed). It never occurred to him until he faced Mrs. Ducey in her sitting-room that logic and common sense had nothing to do with the matter; that he might as well appeal to the laws of mathematics and gravitation for all the effect his reasoning would have on this pretty, warm-hearted, impulsive, and unyielding woman. And after all, thought Nathan, as he walked away in his defeat, how logical and how sensible were his objections? Upon a stern examination they resolved into nothing but a conviction as deep-rooted, yet, without doubt, as utterly unreasonable as any Mrs. Anne could possibly hold, that she and Nance would never get along. He could no more argue himself out of that belief than he could argue Mrs. Ducey into it. Nance Darnell in the Ducey household! The idea assumed to him the likeness of a wildly disagreeable joke, a goblin trick of Fate — but unfortunately that would not be a thesis calculated to persuade or impress anybody. And supposing (he said to himself) that this experiment is tried and fails — as it is of a surety foredoomed to fail — what then? Why, the heavens will not fall. Nance will go elsewhere, take up some other way of life — that is all. Nothing tragic about that, nothing to stir him to such painful anxiety. Yet he remembered the girl's rapt face as she poured out to him this astonishing news with a sharp sting of pity, a helpless foreboding. She was so

happy, so bewildered in admiration, so pathetically unconscious of what Mrs. Ducey's interest really meant, that Nat could not find it in his heart to darken her. In truth it would have been almost impossible to make Nance comprehend exactly what Mrs. Ducey's plan as regarded herself was; she only knew that she was to live in the house with her goddess; that this dazzling creature had noticed her, liked her, wanted her, was enough for Nance. The backwoods does not prepare young women for a useful career of domestic servitude; to take Nance from that liberal environment and fit her to a neat little round of household duties, handcuff her with a hundred conventions of behavior, of class and social position, would be not merely a hopeless, but a heart-breaking task. And certainly Mrs. Ducey was the last person in the world who should attempt it.

What would happen when Nance discovered that her idol had feet of clay? That dingy tragedy occurs to all of us at least once in our lives. Down he falls, our pet deity, out goes the altar-fire, the tripod is overset, Lord bless me, the sacrificial vessels are nothing but gilt tin, the wreaths are all faded rags, and oh, what a bitter cup of disillusionment has the libation become! We all get over it, and go our ways, and by and by erect a good new serviceable god of whom we are careful not to ask too much. But Nance was not the temper to accept this good-humored compromise; there was nothing easy-going about her beliefs, and the crash of her temple would be a grim experience. Nathan, who by the way was not indulging in these fine, high-flown metaphors, but setting the matter before himself in very plain and sober language, shrank from imagining the girl's anguish of disappointment. He said all that he could, hinted all that he could to dissuade her. I think he protested too much. But he might have sworn upon a stack of Bibles: "Nance, your angel, Mrs. Ducey, is no angel at all. She is a very good woman, but she is impatient, she is tyrannical, she is inconsistent, she is obstinate, she is as thoughtlessly brutal as a child. She is interested in you not for yourself, for about your character and individuality she cares no more than if you were her pet canary, but because the spectacle of a creature so beautiful and so destitute moves her to that kind of philanthropy which is neither more nor less than benevolent meddling. In a

little while she will forget all about your good looks; you will be to her like her marquetry desk, which is a lovely thing but a nuisance to take care of. She will be out of patience with your rough ways, your uncouth speech will offend her, she will weary of teaching you, she will not understand your little aspirations or will laugh at them, she will walk rough-shod over your spirit, she will carelessly insult your dearest memories. She will not mean to, Nance, her intentions are the best in the world — but have you the philosophy to remember that?" And what good would this handsome long oration have done? None at all, and Nathan knew it.

No plan that he could have invented would have seemed to Mrs. Ducey better than her own, but the young man was a good deal handicapped by the knowledge that he could think of none. The question: "Well, and what would you have Nance do?" closed his mouth. He could only reiterate that he would not have her do this. He was fain at last to give up the problem, to let matters take their course, yet it was with a consciousness of disloyalty to Darnell's trust. He promised himself that he would see Nance often, talk to her, help her, perhaps try to explain the puzzling conditions of this new life to her. The self-conceit of these resolves fills him now with a derisive impatience. I think Mr. Burke's solemn preachifying would not have done much good; but indeed he never got so far, for on the few occasions when he saw Nance while she was a member of the Ducey household, some saving sense of humor, or common humanity, I hardly know which, restrained him.

The truth is, Nat's life seemed to him very full, busy, and varied at this time. He had just succeeded to Mr. Quilldriver's desk, Mr. Marsh sent him to Gallipolis that summer, to Chillicothe, to Lancaster, hither and yon. He talked with great men in their counting-rooms, and wrote long letters and carried grave reports to his tough old chief chewing tobacco by the stove in the back office of DUCEY & Co. The old man liked and trusted him in his harsh, measuring way. When he heard that the young fellow was studying law, he commended that ambition; he himself advanced the ten dollars with which Nathan took out a notary's seal — he did not *give* it, in spite of his hearty approval, for that would have been contrary to Mr. Marsh's notions of a proper busi-

ness discipline. "It'll come handy, Nat; it's a kind of convenience for me to have a notary right here in the store. 'S'-help-you-God,-forty-cents,' hey? Ho, ho!" he said, chuckling. "You ought to charge 'em forty cents every time you swear 'em, you know. I guess you can write contracts and conveyances, too, by this time, can't you? And make out an abstract of title, hey?" And Nat acknowledging that he could, and did, and sometimes took in a little money by these accomplishments, old George nodded his head approvingly. "That's right — always have more than one iron in the fire," said he. In other talks he gave Burke the benefit of his accumulated worldly wisdom, letting in an occasional sidelight on his own shrewd and calculating, yet not at all unkindly, character. By degrees and in odd hours at the store he told the young man the whole of his hard, adventurous, conquering history; it was not the least interesting of the stories which have been confided to Mr. Burke's extraordinarily receptive ear; and some of its details were of real use to him in later years.

"Know how I came to settle here?" said the old man. "Why, it happened this way. I came up from N'Orleans the summer of eighteen-twelve, close on to thirty years ago. I was at Zanesville when I heard the proprietors — there were four of 'em, you know, that had undertaken with the Government to get up a city here — were going to auction off the lots on the town site the first part of June. Soon as I heard that I came along up here with a lot of others and they began the sale the eighteenth — the very day the United States declared war against the old country. There weren't anything but log-cabins here then, but they had the whole place laid out on paper, High Street, Town Street, everything. The sale went on for three days. First day I did a little buying. Then I kind of hung off — I was just waiting 'round, you know, just waiting 'round, Nat," said the old fellow, turning his quid and grinning. "Second day a man I knew come to me and says, 'Why, Marsh, ain't you bidding in any?' 'I'm bidding some,' says I; 'way things are going, I've got to be careful,' I told him. 'Why, Lord,' he says, 'you don't have to pay it all down. They make the sales by title-bond, you know, and you don't have to give but a third or fourth of the price and

they'll take your notes for the rest.' 'I haven't got any too much money,' says I; 'I just thought I'd wait 'round a little — just wait 'round.' Ye see, Nathan, I'd sized up a plenty of the buyers, and thinks I to myself: 'Gentlemen, if you've got the money to take up those notes as they come due annually, I'll be surprised. Some of this property will be on the market cheap inside of three or four years, or my name ain't George Marsh.' And, by damn, Nat, that's exactly what happened. I settled right down here to keep my eye on it. 'Twas going to be a kind of a lengthy business, but I didn't know any better way to put in my time. In about two years more than a third of the lots had come home to roost, as you might say. Some fellow'd make a payment and put out all the cash he had on an improvement, and that would bust him up. The lot would fall back to the proprietor. Well, the lots being in the proprietors' hands and their giving time on the payments kind of kept prices up — that is, from two to five hundred dollars a lot — for four-five years. I just kept waiting 'round. Once in a while I'd go off to Cincinnati, or N'Orleans, or N'York, but mostly I stayed here. Then finally two of the proprietors failed themselves — and *then* maybe there wasn't a whaling lot of land for sale! The United States Marshal and Sheriff put the lots up at forced sale after they'd appraised and offered 'em two or three times, and money was so scarce in the county they just *had* to sell. Some of 'em went for ten, fifteen, twenty dollars." Old George jingled the coins in his pockets significantly. "That Front Street piece was one of 'em," he remarked. "I've sold out most of what I bought right here, but some I've got over in the Refugee Tract I've held on to. Funny thing, the fellow that owned that ought to have made a good thing out of it, for he bought it himself at Sheriff's sale, but I guess he wasn't much of a manager. *I* made money on that transaction, Nat."

Nathan thought he deserved to profit. The picture of old George, canny and patient as a veteran cat at a mouse-hole, was so characteristic, so naïvely humorous, that Burke laughed with a deeper relish than his patron suspected. These manœuvres would have been beyond Nat's own powers; he had not much turn for affairs, as indeed Marsh knew perfectly well. It was the younger man's turn for hard

work, his certain integrity, the gift of plain talk, and likewise the gift of holding his tongue that won his senior's favor. "You're doing right to try and make a lawyer of yourself, Nathan," he said, not without a touch of regret. "It's what you're cut out for — you'd never make much of an out at this. You're the kind of man people naturally talk to — they want to tell their troubles to somebody, and they've got a feeling you're safe. You can't put that into men. You've got to be born that way; and it's a good thing to be born with, no difference what you do, whether you're a lawyer, or whatever you are." He finished almost with a sigh — which would have been a remarkable evidence of sentiment from old George Marsh. It may be he was thinking of his unavailing efforts to convert into "safe" men his brother — William Ducey — or even young George.

Mr. George Marsh Ducey, to tell the truth, showed the slightest possible disposition towards either the legal or the mercantile career, or in fact a career of any sort. He was at this time one of the most elegant young gentlemen it has ever been Burke's lot to behold. This spring and summer having returned from Miami University, a seat of learning where he had been, — as he very soon let everybody know, — entirely unappreciated, he used to visit the store occasionally, and even had a desk assigned to him in one corner of the office. At least an hour daily did George occupy this august eminence. He came down about ten o'clock of a summer morning, languid and exquisite in snowy white ducks, with the dark blue coat, the marseilles waistcoat delicately dotted with pink rosebuds, the rich satin scarf with which the dandies of the day adorned themselves. The clerks surveyed him in measureless admiration; old Marsh raised his shock eyebrows and grunted when his namesake strolled in, affable, Chesterfieldian, illuminating those gloomy precincts with his gracious presence, "shedding fragrance" like the gods and goddesses in the *Æneid*. George did not injure his health by too close application to business, thereby following out his mother's anxious injunctions. His desk was a miracle of neat order, and after he had read the paper nothing else of moment ever occurred to disturb it. He went home to dinner at noon, and spent the rest of the day relaxed in what he himself had been overheard to style

"the delights of female society." There was no lack of that at the Ducey house, which still swarmed with visitors as it had in Burke's day. How did Nance Darnell get on amongst these decorative and decorated ladies? George spoke of her with a pleasing patronage; but he patronized us all, from his uncle down, and I fear that George's opinions and sometimes his reports were not always reliable.

"That Darnell girl has a dev'lish tempah — the tempah of a devil, absolutely, Nathan," he remarked casually, inspecting the other with his soft, dark, expressionless eyes; "told her to black my boots the othah day and she flew out of the room like a wildcat — a regulah wildcat, b'George! All but threw the boots in my face. Mothah had to go aftah her and ordah her to do it — she generally will obey Mothah, you know. B'George, that's the kind they take the whip to, down South. A person in her position can't afford to have that kind of a temper — tempah. 'Twon't do in a servant, you know."

Nathan listened in silence, biting his lips. It sometimes seemed to him that George made a point of detailing these wretched scenes to him, forever dragging poor Nance into the conversation, and flaunting her, as it were, in her character of menial before Burke's face; not till long afterwards did Nathan find out the reason. A greater man than he can ever hope to be once said that the jokes of dull people are always cruel; and no doubt George mightily fancied his own powers of raillery, took it as a dainty bit of fun to remind the ex-hired man of his humble beginnings and of the no less humble situation of his lady-love. George was a little mistaken in his estimate of Burke; the latter was not in love with Nance Darnell, but had he been, and were Nance ten times a servant, Nat would have felt neither shame nor resentment at this graceful waggishness. What roused him to ineffectual anger and pity was the thought of the poor girl herself with her fanatic devotion, her ignorance, her crooked pride, incongruously subject to George Ducey. We may talk as much as we please about the dignity of honest toil, but, sir, how would you like to black the boots of the man you despise? "She can't stand it very much longer at this rate," thought Nat, and wondered at the vitality of Nance's feeling for Mrs. Anne.

"Mothah's been trying to teach her to read and write," pursued George, in the mellow drawl which he carefully affected of late, having been complimented on his charming Southern pronunciation by some member of the "female society" wherein he shone; "she said she knew how when she came, but really she didn't, you know. 'Pon my word it's ridiculous — regulahly laughable. She brought Mothah her slate with 'many' spelled m, e, double n, y, you know, and Mothah burst out laughing — Mothah's full of fun, and that was a little too much for her. Then off she went — Nance, I mean — in anothah tantrum! Mothah says it's terribly trying. Just think! Francie cried — never could see a joke, Francie. Mothah went out and found her with Nance, and Francie was positively crying."

"Francie always was a dear little girl," said Nat, huskily.

"Yes. Aw — by the way, Burke, don't you think you'd — aw — bettah say 'Miss Blake'?"

"Why, yes, certainly," said Nathan, agreeably; "I had forgot she was getting to be a young lady."

"And — aw — perhaps you'd bettah stop calling me 'George,' you know — ?"

"Why, are *you* getting to be a young gentleman?" asked Burke, with a lively surprise and interest; "dear me, I never noticed it!" — a remark which George received without at all suspecting that it was capable of two interpretations, so that Mr. Nat's fine sarcasm benefited only himself. Even when the boy irritated him most, Nathan could always relieve his temper by some such speech, secure in the amused knowledge that George would never understand it. There would have been a kind of brutality in using severe measures with George; something curiously feminine in his feeble spitefulness restrained one. You could not be angry with a creature so weak; it seemed as if any man should be able to withstand his pygmy assaults. It was only when George made himself a serious inconvenience that he must be treated with active severity; but this occurred with increasing frequency during the latter half of Burke's tenure of the head-bookkeeper's desk under Mr. Marsh.

He was considerably surprised to see George returning to the store about five o'clock one evening, an hour when young Mr. Ducey was most often to be observed richly gloved and

waistcoated, fresh curled, oiled, and perfumed, taking the air by the side of his mother in the family carriage; or perhaps himself escorting one of the favored fair in a high, fashionable, two-seated vehicle which had lately been bought for his use. George was a great ladies' man; terrific was the slaughter his eyes, figure, dress, and manners had wrought among the sex — he said so himself with regret. Not in direct, rough words, of course, but exercising that species of clever and well-bred innuendo of which he was the master. So when this conqueror was beheld abandoning his natural field at the most propitious season for the grimy and gritty neighborhood of the warehouse and its shirt-sleeved society, wonder ran among the ranks of clerks. They were preparing to close up; the elder Ducey had already gone home. One lad was sweeping out the front of the place, while another laid the dust with a sprinkling-can. Nathan was posting his books in the office, his lank legs wreathed about his stool, the familiar aroma of codfish and 'Sisal hemp' ascending to him in cool, earthy gusts from an open hatchway leading to the cellar, when the not less familiar odor of George's *millefleurs* and Macassar caused him to look up.

"Hello!" he said in astonishment, pausing with a suspended pen. "What on earth are you doing here?"

"That's what every single one of those boys has been saying!" said George, peevishly; "infernal bad mannahs, *I* call it. Why shouldn't I be here, I'd like to know?" He came in, drawing the door to after him with unusual care. It squeaked aloud on its hinges, being seldom closed; and, indeed, the wood was so swelled with recent dampness that George could not force the door into its frame, and gave up trying to latch it in a sudden and most unnatural burst of temper. "Oh, damn!" he said, flinging himself down in his uncle's arm-chair; he threw out his legs, kicking the spittoon aside viciously, and began to bite his nails with a very moody and perturbed countenance. Nathan looked at him puzzled; George's disposition was so mild, equable, and self-satisfied that it was hard to guess what could have so disturbed him. "I suppose his last new coat doesn't fit," said Burke to himself, and turned again to his figuring, not being much given to inquiring into other people's affairs, which they were generally only too willing to confide to him unsolicited.

"I say, Burke —" George began after a momentary silence.

Nat finished the entry and raised his eyes. "Well?" he said — and wondered to see George flinch under his gaze.

"You — ah — you've got such a quick way of moving your head and eyes, Nat," said the other, with an uneasy smile; "you kind of take a fellow aback. I guess that's what makes you such a cracking good shot, hey? I was telling a fellow the othah day that you were the best shot I evah saw. 'There's Burke,' says I; 'he's got an eye like a rifleman, wonderful, b'George, wondahful!' 'Why,' he says — it was Billy White — you know Billy, don't you? — 'Why,' says Billy; 'Burke? he was your hired man, wasn't he?' Said it just that way — kind of a sneering way, you know, Nat. I just turned right 'round on him. 'Hired man be damn!' I says; 'Nat Burke's a gentleman, and what's more he's *my friend*. I just want you to remember, Bill White, that anybody that says anything against him says it against *me!*' I wouldn't have him talking that way about you, Nathan. I let him know flat I wouldn't stand it," said George, nobly.

"I don't see that he said anything against me," said Burke, returning to his ledger.

"It was the way he said it, Nat; it was his mannah — low-down sort of a fellow, Bill White — fathah was a horse-doctah, b'George!" cried George.

"So may mine have been, for all I know," Nat said, grinning. He closed the book, wiped his pen, and began clearing up his desk. One of the clerks shouted a question at him from the front, and Nathan shouted back directions as he sought his coat and hat hanging on their nail. George watched him nervously.

"I don't know what fathah and Uncle George would do without you, Nat; positively I don't believe they could get along," he said earnestly; "they just leave everything to you and go off when they choose, don't they? Is — ah — Uncle George now — he isn't around anywhere, is he?"

"I think he's gone home — I saw him start out," Nathan told him. "Did you want to speak to him?"

No, oh, no, George didn't want to speak to his uncle. He

just dropped in — just dropped in, you know, Nat. He'd been thinking he ought to get down to the store more regulahly, but he'd been sick. He was sick, you know, curse it, sick a good deal of the time, and the rest, Mothah would hardly let him out of her sight — or the girls got hold of him, you know how girls are. He smirked faintly at the last words, and pulled up his shirt-collar with a side-glance into the little old cracked looking-glass in the corner where the office-force were wont to straighten their plebeian ties and head-gear before going out on the street. It reflected a sickly pale, anxious, and flurried face this time; and Nathan, washing his hands at the battered stand just around the partition (such being our inelegant toilet-arrangements), saw it with a humorous concern. What under heaven could be the matter with George? He certainly had not come all the way back to the store at this hour of the day to retail complimentary anecdotes about Burke's career and character. Whatever his purpose, he seemed to be thoroughly at a loss, groping in a jungle of impulses, amongst which the strongest and best defined was apparently to propitiate Nathan. And the latter, who, during the whole of his life, had never felt himself under the necessity of propitiating anything or anybody save his own vigilant conscience, was at once repelled and interested by the spectacle. Even while he reflected he saw the other's face light up as with a new and brilliant idea.

"I say, Burke," he began again, this time with abundant confidence, however. "I nearly forgot what I came in for — funny thing, isn't it, how one gets to talking and forgets? Mothah wants to change a twenty-five-dollar bill, and she told me if I was passing by to stop in and get you to do it. Four or five dollahs in silvah, and the rest in greenbacks will do, she said."

"All right," said Burke, moving to the cash-drawer, with a passing wonder at the obliquity of George's mental processes. Why not say his mother wanted the money at once and be done with it? Why not —? Nathan paused with his hand in his pocket sorting out the key; he turned; George was at his elbow and their glance crossed. This time the smooth brown eyes did not falter.

"Mothah said —" George went on fluently.

"Your mother gave you the bill, I suppose?" asked Nathan, holding out his hand.

"Why, no — just like a woman, wasn't it? She forgot to — started upstairs to get it out of her desk, and then went off about something else. My grandmothah's there now, you know, and they get to talking and nevah stop all day long. But it's all right, you know, perfectly safe. I should think I'd hardly need to tell you that *here*," said George, with a touch of loftiness. "Just make it five dollahs in silvah and —"

"I can't give you any money that way, George," said Nat. "Not in my position, you know. I'm sorry. I guess your mother will have to wait till to-morrow." He could have laughed but for a kind of reluctant contempt he felt at the chagrin in the other's face.

"She can't wait — really she can't, Nat," said George, feverishly; "she — she's got to pay a bill — a — a dress-maker's bill, they always have to have change to pay a bill, you know. Mothah can't bear to keep work-people waiting — why, *you* know that. She — she really needs the money."

Nathan leaned against the desk, surveying him silently. It was not worth while to answer; he wondered with an extraordinary mixture of pity and shame and amusement what George would do or say next, to what lengths he would go.

"Well, aren't you going to give me the money?" demanded the boy, — for after all he was only a boy, — sharply.

"No."

"I'd like to know why, Nathan Burke. That's my fathah's money you've got locked up in that drawer. It's — it's *my* money, by God, and you haven't any right to keep it locked up when I want it!" shrieked out George, losing his self-command under this strain.

"I thought you said your mother wanted it."

"That's what I'm saying — that's what I mean. I — I was just joking, you know, Nat," said George, with a smile so ghastly it moved the older man almost to compassion; "she — she don't quite need twenty-five, she could do with twenty, or — or fifteen. Can't you —? Only fifteen, Nat?" George was in earnest now at any rate. The sweat stood on his forehead; he made small, fluttering gestures.

It was incredibly pitiful, incredibly mean. He saw refusal in Burke's face, and flung off from him in a fit of womanish fury.

"I tell you what it is, Burke, you're going to be sorry for this! I've only got to lift my finger — yes, I've only got to say one word and out you go, do you know that? D'ye suppose my fathah's going to have any damned impudent upstart like you around ordering *me?* You're *afraid,* that's what's the matter with *you* — you've been helping yourself. S'pose I can't see that, hey? Is there twenty-five dollars in the drawer — is there? How much have you been nibbling off at a time? How long — ?" he stopped, gasping, shrinking back against the wall in a terror so desperate it reminded Nathan of some hunted animal. "Don't strike me, Nathan, don't! I — I — I didn't mean it — I —"

"I'm not going to strike you," said Burke; "but calling me a thief won't help you any, you know, George. What's the matter? Are you in trouble? Haven't you any money?"

"I don't owe anybody," George cried out eagerly; and at the preposterous naïveté of this lie Nathan could not keep back a smile. "What are you grinning at? I tell you I don't" — he stammered, his face turned clay-color, he almost cowered in the corner. And upon the instant in walked, stalked, stamped, old George Marsh!

It answered grotesquely to the awful scene in "Don Giovanni" when the statue enters. The old man must have heard every word, having been, as he afterwards explained to Burke, occupied in sampling a consignment of spices in the cellar almost beneath their feet. An acute sympathy for George invaded and took possession of Nathan, warring the while with an untimely desire to laugh. For it was not at all funny. The boy was so abject in his fine clothes, so pitiable with his weak frame and face. Mr. Marsh himself was quite unconscious that his entrance supplied the last touch of melodrama; he had merely come up from the cellar when it suited his convenience, and now stood, breathing a little short, for he was a heavy though still sturdy man and the steep stair had winded him, and eying his grand-

nephew with his small, steady old eyes, bedded in thick folds and wrinkles. He sat down.

"George," he said, not unkindly; "no, stand where you are — don't shake that way. What are you afraid of? I'm not going to hurt you — nobody's going to hurt you. You want money? How much?"

"I — I don't want any money, Uncle George, I — I wasn't asking for money. Mothah wants —"

Old George waved his hand. "Never mind that," he said briefly. "You want money? How much?"

"I — I — twenty-five dollahs — or thirty — thirty dollahs," said George, recovering somewhat.

"Give it to him, Burke," said the old man; and Nathan turned again to the cash-drawer, not greatly surprised. On the other hand, George, as was plainly to be seen, was very agreeably startled and relieved; if he had known it was as easy as this, he would not have wasted all that painful and circuitous diplomacy. By the time Nathan had counted out the sum, George was himself again, and magnanimously accepted it, ready to forget and forgive.

"Of course it was unfortunate me leaving Mothah's check at home, Uncle George," he explained; "the fact is I'm a little — ah — careless about money mattahs. But you acted quite right, Burke, quite right, to refuse to give me the money. I'm sure you're very reliable. Only, you see, I found it a little trying. I knew it would be all right, but you weren't here, you know, Uncle George, and though I kept telling Burke he was perfectly secure, still he wouldn't give it to me. Regulah watch-dog, b'George!"

"I heard you," said Mr. Marsh. He drew a long breath that was almost a sigh, and passed his coarse, veined, hairy old hand over his chin, looking up at his nephew thoughtfully. "Thirty dollars ain't all you owe, hey, George?"

"Sir? Why, yes — that is, no — I don't owe — I — I —"

"Nobody ever tells all they owe," said old George, calmly. "However — " he made a gesture in which Nathan discerned a certain weariness, and sat for a moment rasping his fingers along his chin and staring absently at or through the young men, as it might be, into that past of his which was doubtless stocked with just such sordidly trivial scenes. He roused himself.

"Run along, George, keep out of trouble — if you can," he said. "Run along, I tell you. Burke always sees the place shut up."

As this history is that of Nathan Burke and not of Mr. George Ducey it will be necessary, with whatever regret, to omit an account of all the scenes similar to that just recorded in which the latter young gentleman figured. It was the first of a long series; for if there ever was a time when George was not in need of money, Burke never knew of it. He had a handsome allowance which he invariably anticipated to the last penny; it was increased — still it dribbled through his fingers; increased again, yet the first of the month always saw him out of pocket and manœuvring with a curious fertility of cheap excuses to get more. He was not the only young fellow who has suffered from an inability to fit his coat to his cloth. General Burke, who is a pattern old gentleman, can remember a certain early acquaintance of his sinking various sums of money in the game of poker — at which this youth greatly fancied himself for a while — at one period of his interesting career. If his losses were after all not so very large, they were still more than he had means to pay out of his compact salary of bookkeeper; so he went forth and pawned his overcoat — yea, for nine dollars and a half he pawned it, with a greasy old Hebrew who heartily invited his patronage; and he satisfied that debt, and never played another game of poker for twenty years. But what became of George Ducey's money? Perhaps he himself could scarcely have told. He spent it on nobody but George Ducey, yet he had no vices. No one ever saw or heard of George being drunk or playing poker; and for the coarser indulgences he had neither the health, nor, I honestly believe, the taste. He was not in the least a good fellow, a boon companion, as the phrase goes; indeed, he had few close friends of either sex, although he cut a tremendous dash socially, as I have attempted to describe. He could dance beautifully, his dress was impeccable, his manners overwhelmingly studied and exact — then what was the matter with George Ducey? It would be unjust — at least, so it seemed to Burke — to say of a creature so harmless that he was "no earthly good." Yet Nat heard that said of George more than once. His mother believed him perfect, admired

him to his face, hovered over him with a thousand touching maternal cares. More than likely she bestowed on him all her savings, scraped and stinted and wore old bonnets, and turned old dresses and went through all a woman's petty tragedy of economy and management to provide for his whims, bullied her husband and cajoled her uncle into paying his bills, — nor, with all this, ever allowed herself to perceive of what poor stuff her idol was compact. About this resolute and deliberate blindness of women there is something so noble and pathetic we forget its desperate silliness; we even lean on it and trust to it. For if a man's mother will not stand up for him, where shall we look for faith and loyalty?

CHAPTER XIV

In which we hear a little more Ancient History

Mr. James Sharpless, of whom mention has been made pretty often herein, and whom Burke began to know very well about this time, was born — as the two young fellows found upon comparing notes — in the same year with Nat himself, that famous year of the big squirrel-hunt, at Harrisburg in Pennsylvania, where his father happened to be stationed in cure of souls. If I am not mistaken, the name is native to that State, having been borne with honor by many stout citizens of the Society of Friends, to whom Jim's father was undoubtedly related. The elder Sharpless was already a middle-aged man, and his wife no longer young, when Master James entered their lives with his disturbing personality. "I was a kind of a postscript, Nat," Jim used to say in his reckless way; "Mary — my sister Mary, you know — was their only child, and she was ten years old. I dare say they didn't expect to have any more, when I came along and upset everybody's calculations. Pretty good chance to make a spoiled little brat, wasn't it? Well, I *am* spoiled, I suppose, according to father's notions," he would conclude with a short sigh.

Not long after his birth the family removed to Ohio, and Jim could remember no other home than the little, one-storied frame parsonage beside the church on State Street. It was a cold, simple, plain place; the minister's salary was not large, and too much temporal comfort would not have been becoming to his cloth and calling at any rate, in Mr. Sharpless's rigid belief. They were in no danger of it; among Jim's first recollections were the unceasing activities of his mother, patching, mending, devising carpets out of rags, bracing up lame chairs, tinkering at hinges and window-cords, surreptitiously laundering underwear, stealthily carrying out ashes, and performing other duties not suited to the state and dignity of a clergyman's wife. From the time he

was old enough to sit at table he used to receive and obey with a humorous understanding secret instructions to refuse butter and not ask for a second helping of anything, whether joint or pudding. Mrs. Sharpless accomplished prodigies in the way of making her own and Mary's clothes, and cutting down her husband's for the little fellow; once Jim furiously attacked an older and bigger boy who had dared to offer some disparaging comment on the paternal trousers as they appeared nicely adjusted to the filial legs. He came home from school blubbering with rage, with a black eye and a bleeding nose — and incontinently received extra chastisement from his father's cane, and was locked in the woodshed, supperless, to reflect on the Sin of Temper. I fear this dungeon became sadly familiar to young James as the years advanced; he was forever falling foul of the authorities, domestic or foreign, on one point or another, and used to take his beating and imprisonment in a stoic silence which of itself afforded proof to his father of the lad's obdurate and stiff-necked disposition. Original sin undoubtedly encompassed his son, the parson thought with sorrow, and girded himself up and warred against it unswervingly. Once, in passing, Jim pointed out to Burke the shed of penance, and a little window which, he said, was over his father's desk in the minister's study. "That was where I used to get my correction," he said; "it was pretty frequent. Mother would be crying in the next room — heigh-ho!"

It is doubtful whether the head of the household observed at all those small devices by which his wife sought to make both ends meet and keep a decent front, in the stern spiritual exaltation with which he pursued his religious vocation. He was shut up in that shabby study, deeply busied with his books, his theological treatises, and the terrifying eloquence of his sermons from morning to night. The little boy held his breath and went on tiptoe past the door. He described to Nathan how he figured God in a solemn isolation with books and a table and a formidable black cane like his father; and wondered how the company of the blest with their harps and noise could be allowed in that austere neighborhood, or what sort of accommodations would be provided in heaven for people like his mother, who was always so brave, cheerful, gay, ready-witted, and tender. Jim spoke of her with an

admiring affection that touched the other young man to the heart; and indeed when Burke came to know Mrs. Sharpless, he thought his friend's enthusiasm well-grounded, and saw in the son not a few of the mother's kindly and winning and eminently humane traits.

It will have been seen that, notwithstanding the accepted theories about these late arrivals, Jim grew up under as severe a discipline as could have been wished. The Reverend Mr. Sharpless was an earnest, heart-searching man, and the gospel which he preached, and for which he would have gone to the stake with unflinching fortitude, was not one of tenderness or toleration. He was afraid to spare the rod, although he could not have applied it with any relish. A just man, he labored hard under the burden of his parental responsibilities, racked his soul with prayers for guidance — and still felt his child elude him. A less conscientious father might have succeeded better. One could have believed, according to the reverend gentleman's own grim creed, that the two were foreordained to disagree. Jim must have been a quick, bright, puzzling, and puzzled youngster; he asked questions and drew inferences with that staggering infantile logic before which we have all stood confounded and subtly amused. But to the father whose literal imagination presented God and the devil in a concrete personal presence and power, it doubtless often seemed as if the last-named prompted Jim to his discomfiture. The child's very precocity was a menace to his salvation, in his elder's alarmed view. When he was no more than six or seven, Jim, having got hold of, or been given a copy of "Robinson Crusoe," came in his reading to that part of the narrative where Crusoe's efforts to convert his savage to Christianity are set forth with all Defoe's veracity of imagination and seizing simplicity. "If God so much stronger than devil, why God no kill devil?" asks Friday, innocently — and honest Robinson is hard put to it for an answer. Who would have supposed that "Robinson Crusoe" would be a book to corrupt the young? But Mr. Sharpless, finding Jim brooding over this passage, took and locked it away from him in disapproving and foreboding horror — an act than which nothing could have been better calculated to fix and emphasize the ideas Man Friday had suggested to the boy's mind. A hundred times the poor

father thus defeated his own ends; a miserably perverse fate governed all their relations, and when he heard that sorry tale of years of misunderstanding and tyranny and rebellion, Nat Burke's heart ached for them both. Without doubt there was a strong similarity between the two characters; and it is sad to think of these two brave, turbulent, honest spirits, each incapable of compromise, doomed to be eternally at odds. The present generation would find Jim's heretical views — which the boy very early arrived at and boldly pronounced — not at all shocking, scarcely even noticeable, so far have we advanced (or strayed from, which you choose!) that narrow road in which the Reverend Sharpless's feet were set. So my son is honorable, is kind, is temperate, just, and manly, I ask few questions about his creed; and if he finds solace and inspiration in some certain form of worship or in none at all, I do not try to bend him. But in Jim Sharpless's young days, the Lord was a jealous God; the fires and tortures of the Place of Punishment were very real, much more real, somehow, than the jewellery-box decorations of the Place of Reward — and that both localities actually existed, I am sure Mr. Sharpless and every other good church-member never doubted. "The trouble with all the creeds is that not one of the people who invented 'em had a sense of humor," Jim used to say — a remark which then — and perhaps now — would cause the hair of the orthodox of whatever denomination to stand on end. The world was made in seven days — the Serpent invaded Eden — the sun went back on the dial of Ahaz — the walls of Jericho tumbled down incontinently at the trumpets' sounding. Young Jim Sharpless irreverently, blasphemously denouncing these statements as untrue, or as not adding in the least to the majesty of the Creator even if they were true, scandalized the community. "Juggling with wine and water to accommodate a lot of carousing Jews at a wedding is a mighty cheap business for God to be about, it seems to me," declared the unfortunate boy — could Satan himself have said worse? We may believe Jim suffered for his levity — if it was levity. In any other cause he would have been esteemed an honorable martyr; the best of faiths could not have asked a more devoted, self-sacrificing, courageous, and inflexible adherent than was Jim to his sacrilegious opinions. It was strange to Burke —

who, truth to tell, was always content enough to take religion as he found it and never had the time or disposition to speculate — it was strange to him, I say, to witness his friend's fierce and painful strivings, his relentless search for some spiritual rock of rest and truth. Ever since he was old enough to think independently at all, Jim said, the struggle had gone on. What distress it had caused his father and himself, who knows? "But I can't help it, Nat, I can't help it," the young man would burst out. "I can't subscribe to his childish beliefs. I can't accept his mean, bargaining deity. When I was a child — yes, when I was twelve years old, I rebelled against it. I wouldn't say my prayers because I'd caught God — my father's God — cheating. They told me He'd give me anything in reason I wanted if it was good for me to have it. So I prayed, reasonably enough, it seemed to me: 'Oh, God, please don't let me have any more sore throats!' (I used to have 'em cruelly, you know — do still, for that matter.) Did God hear me? He may have, but I had the sore throats just the same, and that was enough for me. I wanted Him to act on the square. *I* do; *you* do. Why not God? If He were to come on earth and apply His principles to running Mr. Marsh's store, He wouldn't stay in business a minute. It was too one-sided, I thought, when I was a poor bewildered little boy, trying to make head or tail of it all. I wanted somebody to explain the manifest injustice I saw all around me and make it agree with what I heard about the infinite justice of the Almighty. What did I get? Why, another manifest injustice, a whipping and bread-and-water, in the woodshed. I swear I wasn't a bad boy, Nathan, in spite of what you must have heard — I only wanted to *know*. I don't think I'm a bad man; but God can't hire me to be good. I've about stopped wanting to know. I give it up; I can't see any purpose, beneficent or otherwise, in the universe — I have to let it go at that. I don't know why we're all here, nor where we came from, nor whither we're going, and I solemnly believe no man on earth has ever found out. I'm doing my best to please my own conscience and live up to my own standards, and I don't care a jot about God's. It stands to reason He wouldn't be any kinder nor fairer nor saner, if He existed at all, in the hereafter than He is here; and the very best of church-

men has occasion daily to wonder at His doings with us. You can't relie on Him a minute. An honest, kind-hearted man would do better. Do I shock you? Of course I shocked my father. It's what I said to him that last flare-up we had when he ordered me out of the house. Oh, we'd had hundreds before that; it was wrangle, wrangle all day long ever since I was fifteen — too old for any more canings. I don't see how my mother stood it; she's just as near an angel as they're ever made, I guess. She's come to me with tears in her eyes and begged me wouldn't I *try* a little — just *try* — poor mother! She only wants me to be on good terms with father, you know, in the bottom of her heart she doesn't care what I believe, and if I fell as low as Lucifer, she'd love me just the same. But how could I go into a church and pray? I'd lose my own self-respect — I'd as lief start out to cheat a man in a horse-trade. I said to father: 'Why, don't you suppose that any sort of God would rather have my honest doubt than my unthinking or calculating or hypocritical submission? I can't fool myself, and you want me to try and fool God! The thing you ask me to worship is only superior to myself by its monstrous power; and I think it uses its power very ill. I refuse to believe that any creature so dull and despotic has the disposal of me. I'd rather blunder along my own way —I'd rather a hundred times be lost and damned forever than save myself by a lie —' and then father turned me out of doors. And the worst of it is, Nathan, the worst of it is —" Jim would say, turning his haggard young face upon his companion in a sad perplexity, "that I know the poor old man sorrows in his heart over me. He wrestles with the Lord in prayer — yes, sir, he gets down on his poor stiff old knees every night, and beseeches the gory dummy he believes in to be merciful to his erring son. I — I don't have a very good time in my sin, Nat; at least people might do me the justice to acknowledge that I'm not going to perdition for sheer enjoyment of wickedness. You and Jack Vardaman are the only friends I've got — and the barkeeper at the Erin-go-Bragh. I suppose there's not a crime in the calendar of which I haven't been accused — or considered capable. There's not a woman in town who'll speak to me, except Mrs. William Ducey, *she's* not afraid. She's a good, sweet woman if she has got that

nincompoop of a boy. That dear little thing, that little Blake girl, she's too young, I dare say, to understand what an unspeakable, free-thinking blackguard I am — she let me walk alongside of her on the street the other day. I felt as if I ought in conscience to warn her. I have to avoid my own mother and sister for fear of getting 'em in trouble with father. No, my worst enemy wouldn't call it a path of roses — but I've got to walk it, I've got to walk it to the end."

Jim used to deliver this and like speeches with vast energy, striding about their little room, the color splotching his gaunt cheeks, his deep-set eyes burning with a conviction as firmly rooted and fanatical in its way as his father's, whom he oddly resembled at these moments. Years afterward Burke read those strong and sincere words in which another and surely a kindred spirit declared: " . . . had I lived a couple of centuries earlier I could have fancied a devil scoffing at me . . . and asking me what profit it was to have stripped myself of the hopes and consolations of the mass of mankind? To which my only reply was and is — oh, devil, truth is better than much profit." And reading, perhaps understood Sharpless's attitude a little more clearly. Certainly Nat liked and respected him from the first, spite of the hard names and harder treatment so liberally bestowed on him. They lodged together now, but at the time of their first formal meeting in Vardaman's office, Jim was sleeping in an attic-room somewhere down on Front Street, and eating everywhere and anywhere. From the day of his eviction he never entered his father's house, nor asked the Reverend Mr. Sharpless for a penny. How he lived nobody knew, but that it was not in ease or luxury was abundantly evident from poor Jim's shabby and slip-shod appearance. "Low kind of a hang-dog look the fellah has," George Ducey observed; "evah see such a waistcoat? And his hat — b'George, no gentleman would be seen in such a hat!" Jim, however, had work, — writing of some kind, — hard work and underpaid, from the newspapers. He used to be up at all hours of the night, he prowled about all quarters of the town, he knew countless queer outlandish characters. I think he had more friends than he suspected; he was indomitably gay in his ragged coat, — hopeful, humorous, and gallant-tempered. His manners were not at all like George

Ducey's, yet Burke thought they were the best manners in the world, and to see Jim help an old market-woman with her basket across the muddy street was a lesson in unofficious courtesy. That lean purse of his was at anybody's service, for he certainly took no thought for the morrow; but it seemed to Nathan as if his friend invested this hand-to-mouth existence with a kind of lovable dignity, spreading his sail to the winds of Bohemia with an admirable courage and carelessness. John Vardaman, who was fond of him, once told Burke that he had offered his own home to Jim, even pressed it on him, but the young man refused. "There's your sister — and it might ruin your practice, Jack," he said. And the doctor was forced to admit that there was that danger. "People were so prejudiced in those days, you remember, Burke," said he; "maybe Jim was right, but anyhow, I couldn't persuade him into it." So Jim held on his way, busy with his everlasting note-book in the legislative chambers, the county-offices, and police tribunals of the Court-house, haunting the taverns, coffee-houses, market-stands, pawnshops, hail-fellow-well-met with stage-drivers, actors, pedlers, drovers, twopenny politicians, the rout of vagabonds with which our little capital city was always so well supplied. It was no wonder that with his woful linen, his all but empty pockets, his garret, and his motley associates Jim should have seemed to his father's world in full career upon the downward path. How could a man of such doubtful habits (to say nothing of his known opinions) have any but doubtful morals? People even discerned something incongruous in the companionship of Jim Sharpless and that model character, Mr. Nathan Burke.

"Where on earth did you two first meet?" Vardaman had asked 'us. And Sharpless, with a sonorous gravity, informed him, quoting from a flaming letter which had appeared in a recent issue of the *Journal* that he was "'probably aware that notwithstanding all the legislation on the subject the haunts of vice in our city are in as active operation as ever . . . and it has become fashionable with us to frequent those SINKS OF INFAMY, the BILLIARD-ROOM and the CARD-ROOM, which are bringing —'" Jim went on in a pulpit-like intonation of horror — "'which are bring-

ing, sir, more ruin on the rising generation than all the vices of the brothel ever could —'"

"That's enough," said the doctor, beginning to laugh; "I read that letter. But at what particular sink of infamy — since I infer that's where the acquaintance began — did you —?"

"The Erin-go-Bragh," Burke told him. And added, "The notorious villain, its proprietor, is a very temperate, decent sort of man, by the way."

"And the barkeeper is my very good friend," said Sharpless; "I lodged in the same house and he has two little boys that I used to play with and tell stories to. And at Christmas he invited me downstairs to celebrate with a dish of tripe and onions which Mrs. Barkeeper cooked — and cooked handsomely, too, without sparing the lard; it was the glory that was *grease*. Sir, it cheered the outcast's heart — not to mention his digestive organs, which would be indelicate."

Jim's garret days were over now — forever over, he used to say with a mock-sentimental sigh, and spout, "*Je viens revoir l'asile de ma jeunesse*," with a pretence of doddering old age which was infinitely diverting — since Burke had prevailed on him to share a back room at Mrs. Slaney's with him, which came to pass early in their acquaintance. Mrs. Slaney, whom his dire reputation had not yet reached, thought Mr. Sharpless just a lovely young man — but, there, *any* friend of yours, Mr. Burke —! In a little while Jim was as familiar with Slaney's disastrous career, the daguerreotype, and the votive altar of immortelles as Burke himself, and the widow found him quite as sympathetic. The young fellows considered themselves very lucky in their snuggery with the smell of dinner reeking up the back stairs. Their combined resources furnished them with a somewhat larger — in fact an entirely adequate! — supply of coal and kindlings which they kept handily in a barrel (sawed down to a convenient height, and nicely braced or bound around the edge); they had two little Napoleonic iron camp-beds and a table and two chairs picked up for a song from some second-hand dealer. There was a chest of drawers, and a small shaving-glass of a rather fearsome greenish hue atop of it. Nat's books were marshalled on a shelf, beneath which one might discover, chastely concealed behind a red calico cur-

tain, the wearing apparel of these hermits pendent from a few — a very few — pegs, and their boots ranked upon the floor. The apartment was a "bower of innocence and beauty," Jim asserted to Vardaman, when the latter came to visit them. Neither of them could afford cigars, so an assortment of pipes graced the high, wooden mantle-shelf. Over it they hung up Nathan's faithful old musket with the arms of Great Britain and *Georgius Rex* engraved on its stock. "I used to think that was the name of the fellow that had owned it," said Burke, with a laugh, telling his friend about Darnell and his old camp-fire days. In the middle of the chimney-breast Sharpless set up his most valued — to be frank, it was almost his only — possession, a drawing of his mother and Mary, taken together when the little girl was perhaps eight or nine. Mrs. Sharpless was posed in a short-waisted dress, with her pretty black hair gathered in a ribbon on top of her head; Mary at her knee had a hoop and stick, and embroidered pantalettes and spiral curls; the faces and hands were tinted, and all the rest done in lead-pencil, every hair in every curl touched in painstakingly.

"It's not mine really — I thieved it out of my room when I came away from the house," said Jim, remarking the interest with which his friend surveyed this work of art. "You don't mind its being there, do you?" On the contrary, Nat liked it exceedingly; perhaps he even took advantage of it to invite Jim to further confidences concerning his mother and sister. Was it a good likeness of them both? Did — ahem — did Jim's sister, for instance, look at all like that, now?

"Why, you've seen Mary, haven't you?" Sharpless asked in surprise; "she plays the accompaniments at all the concerts, and lots of other places, too. You must have seen her — kind of a slim girl with dead loads of black hair done up in that sort of basket-work way the girls do their hair, with flowers in it, you know. The picture looks like her still. She isn't exactly pretty — she can't hold a candle to Mother, but she — well, everybody always turns around to look at Mary, I don't know why," said Jim, knitting his brows over this phenomenon.

Nathan, reddening a little consciously, believed that he

could have told why. He felt a sort of shame at this pumping of his friend, yet, in the name of sense, why not? Why not, I say, ask as many questions — civil, proper questions — as he chose about Miss Mary Sharpless? She was a very interesting-looking girl, and — and — and Mr. Nat would have gone to jail sooner than admit to any one, even to Jim, that he had ever given her a thought!

"Mary's old — about thirty, I guess," said the brother, ruthlessly; "she doesn't look it, though. Mother doesn't look her age, either. It's queer, because they've both had rather a hard time, in a kind of woman's way, I mean, you know. Making their own clothes, and father's shirts, and mine, and cobbling things around the house, and taking hold in the kitchen when we haven't any servant, and giving music-lessons, and — and all things like that. It's hard on a woman, must be, I think, to have to be planning and worrying how to make the money last out, the whole time. Mother's wonderful that way — aren't you, Ma?" he said, addressing the smiling young woman in the picture affectionately; "never *you* mind — some day I'm going to get you everything you want, and you shan't have to lift a finger. Mary's not so good at it, but then she — well, Mary's kind of off to herself, somehow — *sui generis*, as Jack would say."

"How 'off to herself'?" Nat demanded.

"Well, just separate, you know, that's all. I mean it's not very easy to get *at* Mary, somehow. She's always on the side of the person she's with at the time; she wouldn't think it good manners to disagree. But anyhow, Mary's very sweet-tempered; she — oh, well, she knows which side her bread's buttered on, and that's the truth. I've heard her telling people that their little girl was a darling little angel and had a perfectly *wonderful* talent for music, when she knew and I knew and anybody that had any sense would know that the youngster couldn't tell 'Yankee Doodle' from 'Old Hundred'! Mary calls it tact; *I* call it — never mind what!" He wagged his hand. "You pays your money and you takes your choice," he said with a laugh.

"Oh, well, a woman, you know —"

Jim, who was cleaning a pipe, looked up from the wire he was drawing through its stem, under his brows, at his

friend and grinned again. "Oh, well, a woman!" he mimicked. "That's just your typical attitude, Nat. You're just the kind any woman could wrap around her little finger if she was smart enough. She's a woman — so she doesn't have to tell the truth, or act like a reasoning human being, or be anything but a divine creature on a pedestal. You want to lie down and let 'em walk over you. Why, by your own say-so, you've stood more bullying and bedevilling from Mrs. Ducey than you'd ever have dreamed of taking from a man. You're afraid of raising your voice for fear of offending their dear little ears, or of touching 'em for fear of hurting their dear little bodies, or of looking at 'em for fear of frightening their dear little —"

"You shut up!" shouted Nathan, indignant yet laughing; "I'm not quite such a sawney as all that!"

"Sawney? Why, not at all — anything but!" James blew out his pipe-stem and tilted back in his chair, roaring out the fag-end of a ditty with which he used to enliven the Slaney precincts: —

"'For his spirit it was tre-men-ju-ous, and fierce to be-HOLD!
In a young man bred a carpenter only nineteen years old!'

What I admire about that song is its power of vivid characterization," he said seriously; "and it is curiously applicable to either one of us —

'For his spirit it was tre-men-ju-ous —'"

"If you don't look out, you'll have the legs off that chair," Nathan warned him anxiously.

"That's the kind of thing Mother's all the time trying to fix," said Jim, arresting himself in the full tide of melody and getting up to examine the chair. "I used to stop her hammering her poor little thumbs black and blue when I was at home. There's a woman you can put on a pedestal as high as you want, Nat," added the young man, soberly; "and my sister's a mighty nice sort of girl, too, if she *is* my sister," he went on quickly; "and if she does tell her funny little woman-fibs. It's just as you say, after all, that sort of thing doesn't count with women; they're brought up to it, more or less. I — I don't want you to think I'd run down

my own sister, Nat. She's had a lot to stand on my account. It's a drawback to any girl to have a man for a brother that everybody calls a worthless coot. And Mary's so attractive too. She's been engaged lots of times."

"Has she?" said Nathan, consumed by a dismal curiosity. "Is — is she engaged now?"

"Why, not that I know of — but then I mightn't hear, anyhow. I can't go to see her, you know. But there used to be somebody spooning around and holding hands with Mary all the time. I was forever getting in the way and being shunted off. Yes, I'm afraid Mary's something of a flirt; she's mowed 'em down in her time, I guess. And it's a little strange when you think, as I say, that she's not quite pretty, only out-of-the-way looking," concluded Jim, meditatively.

Welladay, it was not so very strange to Nat's way of thinking! And I suppose if he had had it on the most creditable authority that Miss Sharpless was old enough to be his mother, that she wore false teeth, false hair, and a wooden leg, and had married and divorced half a dozen husbands, he would still have continued in his timid and distant worship. The young man would not acknowledge it to himself, for he would have been obliged to own his fancy both pitiful and absurd. He refrained from analyzing the feeling that led him out of his road to walk past the Sharpless house, to go and sit in a stiff pew at the back of the church and listen by the hour to a dreary exposition of the here and the hereafter, to direct Jim's talk upon his sister by endless ridiculous stratagems. And what was he to Hecuba? She hardly knew that he existed; she had merely spoken to him once in the angelic kindness of her heart, while he — of all things in the world! — was cutting Mrs. William Ducey's grass. He was not much advanced now upon that ignominious labor — a raw youth keeping books for Mr. Marsh all day, and befogging himself over "Chitty on Contracts" all night! Lord, what fools these mortals be! For mercy's sake, Nathan, knock out your pipe and go to bed!

CHAPTER XV

Which is Short and rather Serious

The two friends used to see a good deal of Dr. John Vardaman these days, either in his State Street eyrie, when they dropped in of an evening, or in their own quarters at Mrs. Slaney's, when the doctor came to see them in an off hour. He made his home with an elderly, unmarried sister, so Burke understood, in a house, some way out on Town Street; their father had been an English gentleman of birth and means, at one time an officer of Pakenham's, who had settled in this country after the late war, and died about 1830, I believe. All this Sharpless told Nathan, for Vardaman himself never mentioned his family except in the most matter-of-fact fashion or hinted at his fine old descent, of which, as the world goes, it would have been natural enough for him to be quite proud. He was very tall, with that kind of commanding homeliness which is sometimes better than good looks, prematurely graying hair, and — Burke used to think — the most pleasant speaking-voice and enunciation ever heard, though he could not sing a note. To hear Jack read was a real treat; he did it without any sort of dramatic affectations, yet with a perfect mastery of expression and an absolute understanding of the author. For the rest, he was an ironical, rather quiet fellow, given to moods of prodigious cynicism and melancholy, as young men sometimes are, when he would offer many stinging criticisms of society, politics, the other sex, and the world at large, being all the while the most tolerant and tender-hearted of men. He was some years older than either of the others, and had had a much wider experience of life, having studied his profession in eastern cities, and walked the hospitals of Edinburgh and Leipzig. People used to wonder that John Vardaman, whose father had left him plenty of money to live comfortably without doing a stroke of work, should yet have voluntarily and in fact most eagerly elected

to follow one of the hardest of professions. It was a point of view with which Burke, for one, was never in sympathy. Surely to do some one thing well is the highest pleasure a man can have, and the work we love is the only play. Nat, to whom the sight of suffering, whether of man or beast, was intolerable, who would sooner have dug ditches or carried a hod than been a doctor, always felt an unmeasured respect for this greatest and most beautiful of vocations. Mr. Burke never had the ill-luck to meet a physician whom he could not like, beginning with John, who was a born doctor, I think. He was very successful and might have made a huge income for those days, if he had not — we suspected — done so much in charity. Somebody told him one day in Burke's presence that all he needed to make him perfect was a wife — "Every young physician ought to marry as a stroke of business. A wife and one or two babies, Vardaman — why, it's money in a doctor's pocket —" said this well-meaning person. It was a piece of jocularity which Vardaman, contrary to his custom, received with a very grum countenance and the brief answer which turneth away fun, so that Burke was struck and interested and inquired privately of Sharpless afterwards what was amiss?

"Well, I guess that sort of talk cuts a little too near the bone with Jack," said the latter, in a vague metaphor; and although Jim, in his exile, still preserved a sort of underground communication with Society, and may very well have heard all about the doctor's infelicities, he would say no more, not being inclined to gossip, nor did Burke press him, for that matter.

It was from Dr. Vardaman that they heard some time in the fall of Mrs. Ducey's illness; there was an influenza going about, of which both Burke and Sharpless were obliged to take their share, the latter's cough attacking him so fiercely and hanging on so long (for Jim was thin, underfed, and not of a strong build) as to give his friend some anxiety. The doctor came and dosed them with the stalwart remedies of the day; he described with a good deal of humor the disastrous experiments of some of his patients with New London Liver Pills, Salter's Ginseng Panacea — Lord knows what quack nostrums. People had a kind of mania for trying these swindling mixtures; the newspapers always exhibited

three or four solid pages of their advertisements. Mrs. Ducey was one of the victims. "She was a pretty sick woman by the time I got there," said the doctor, seriously. "Little Francie Blake was in attendance, and a remarkable-looking girl — remarkably handsome, I mean, in a calico gown and a cap over her black hair — a trying sort of costume, but she looked well in it. She must be a relative — who do you suppose it is, Jim? I thought I knew all of them — but those southern kinships! There's somebody new turning up all the time; Aunt Coralie's third son's step-daughter, who hasn't got anywhere to live, poor child, now that Second-Cousin Oliver Randolph is dead, and so has to come up North and make her home with Fortieth-Cousin Anne Ducey! That's the way it goes — God bless 'em all!" said John, with some feeling. "This young woman had rather a southern look — or call it Oriental — gypsy — anything you choose that's alien and picturesque. She —"

"I know her. Her name's Darnell — don't you remember?" interrupted Nat, coloring a little with the guilty thought that he ought to know more about Nance. He told the doctor her story. "Did — did she seem contented — and — and happy, Jack?" he asked in a strange apprehension. He promised himself, for the twentieth time, to go and see her.

"Contented and happy?" said Vardaman, with a puzzled look; "why, I never noticed. How could I tell, anyhow? I should think she would be in such a good home. She makes a fine nurse, very deft, lightfooted, and intelligent. And patient, I could see that. Between ourselves it's not an easy business, nursing; people are so apt to be fretful and imperious. But this girl — what did you say her name was — Nance? — struck me as most devoted. She waited on me and watched Mrs. Ducey like a cat. She's rather curious, rather interesting, Nathan — I'm glad you told me about her. Beautiful woman, isn't she? And she looked very lovely and tender with Mrs. Ducey —"

"I'm sure little Miss Blake would be that too, she — she's that kind of girl, I know," said Sharpless, abruptly and somewhat heatedly, so that Burke looked at him, taken by surprise.

"Eh? Francie? Oh, yes, Francie's a nice child. But I

was going to tell you the first thing I saw was your old acquaintance, Nat, Vaughn's Vegetable Lithontriptic Mixture, a giant bottle of that elixir of life on the dressing-table! It's enough to try the patience of Job," declared the doctor, vigorously; "people — intelligent, educated people that ought to know better — catch a cold — cough a little — fever — chills — sore throat — no appetite, and all the rest of it, and instead of going to bed sensibly and sending for the doctor, they fribble around with these vile stuffs that would ruin the constitution of a hippopotamus. They spend ten times the money and — " he interrupted himself with a grin — "run actually ten times the risk they would even if they had the most inexperienced and least capable of doctors —"

"To say nothing of that sound medical authority, John Vardaman, M.D.," said Jim. "Pooh — you're jealous!"

"Mr. Sharpless," said Vardaman, ponderously, "you will retract that statement, or I'll poultice you within an inch of your life. I'll mustard-plaster you, sir, into a belief in that warm place which you insist don't exist —"

"It would be taking a great deal of mustard to a very little meat, I think," said Jim, glancing down over his lean anatomy; "but who said I was going to employ you? No, sir, I'll take —" he snatched up the paper from the table and read, "I'll take the Ginseng Panacea, 'which cured Mr. Jukes of Licking Summit and five members of his family of a cough, two of them of long standing. Mr. Jukes also had an aggravated case of dropsy. Eight bottles made him a well man! He is now a robust farmer!' It doesn't say what he was before the eight bottles."

"A chicken-thief, probably," said the doctor. "'Bless thee, Bottom, thou art translated!' Your miserable journals are responsible for spreading these lies, Jim. I wonder you have the face to write for them."

"By heavens, I wouldn't have any face at all if I didn't write for them," said Jim, and laughed and set himself coughing desperately; "I've got to keep body and soul together somehow," he gasped out when the fit was over. "Never mind, Jack, I'll show you what I can do in the cause of righteousness." And he forthwith sat down and wrote the editor of the *Journal* in the character of a subscriber,

extolling the virtues of *Ramrod's Elixir of Gridiron*, which had cured its tens of thousands of every known disease, being a medicine borrowed by the pioneers from the Indian squaws who made a decoction by boiling their husband's rifle-barrels, etc. It appeared within a day or two and made everybody laugh; but Vardaman, meeting Nathan on the street, took him aside with a grave face and urged him to have an eye on Jim. "I suppose you're the only person on earth who can do anything with him or for him, Burke," said the doctor, visibly worried; "his father, you know — I — I don't know what to do about the business. He's really very sick. That spirit of his keeps him up and going around; he'll go till he drops. He *will* work when Lord knows you or I or anybody that knows him at all would lend him money or do anything for him. Make him stay in the house — keep him out of the weather if you can — at night, you know — all the time for that matter. He ought to have good strengthening food, and hasn't he got any warmer clothes? Damn it, why will people mistreat themselves this way!" said John, in a temper, with his kind concern. Burke promised, in alarm; indeed, he had been up half the night before, trying to help his friend, in a clumsy way, through the paroxysms of coughing. Mrs. Slaney herself appeared toward the small hours, feebly tapping at their door, with a candle and her hair in curl-papers, and a purple calico double-gown clutched about her meagre shoulders — a most lugubrious and disheartening figure. "Oh, my, ain't it awful the way that poor young man's been suffering?" she sighed, leaning against the door-jamb, as Nathan shivered before her in his night-shirt and pantaloons. And this being apparently all she had to offer in advice or assistance, Nat finally persuaded her to go away. He began to understand Slaney's behavior.

That same day, a raw and rainy winter day, he came upon Jim whom he had solemnly engaged not to leave the house, up and out in his thin old surtout, with his sunken cheeks and fever-bright eyes, walking along by Francie Blake of all people in the world, carrying some bundle of hers and talking very gayly. Little Francie's face flushed all over as she saw Nat coming towards them; she stopped short in an odd and sweet confusion, looking from one young man to the other.

"We were talking about you, sir," Sharpless cried out, and Francie blushed rosier than ever. Francie was always a diffident child, and although she was now, as Nathan noted with a start of surprise, transformed all at once from a fat, stubby, little girl into a tall, rather thick-waisted, and gangling young woman, — maid — miss, whatever may be the proper term for females at this awkward age, — he still could not think of her as anything but a child. He went up and took the bundle away from Jim, sternly adjuring him to go home; Jim surrendered with some kind of laughing protest, and went off coughing. He wavered in his walk, he trembled with ague from head to foot; Nathan looked after him with wretched misgivings. He walked along gloomily with Francie the familiar way to the Ducey house. Aunt Anne was very sick, the child told him; like Mr. Sharpless, only she didn't think Aunt Anne's cough was quite so bad. She thought Mr. Sharpless was very nice — why did people say such things about him? Nathan growled a savage explanation, his heart full of pain and perplexity. It was not until they reached the door that he thought of Nance Darnell, remembering that he had not even asked about her. Francie said that Nance was well; she hadn't had the influenza at all; she was lovely to Aunt Anne, taking entire charge of her. "She's stronger than I am — she can lift Aunt Anne right up and turn her over, you know. And she's just as gentle as can be, too," said the girl, looking up at him, with the bundle which he had returned to her arms as they stood within the door, with her great, serious, child's eyes. "Don't you want to see Nance, Nathan?"

Nat hadn't time, he must get back to the store — it seemed as if he never did have time, he thought, troubled. "Do you think she's happy here, Francie? Does she get along with — with everybody?" he asked her earnestly.

"Ye-yes — that is —" she looked at him distressfully, her loyal little heart hesitating; "of course it was a little hard for her at first. There were so many things for her to learn and Aunt Anne — Aunt Anne didn't quite understand — but she's been here over six months now, you know, and she's learned ever so much. She says herself she knows a great deal more than when she came. I've shown her some things — she said she liked me to," said Francie, shyly.

Nathan thanked her from his heart; he felt a momentary impulse — which he fortunately controlled, remembering her lengthening skirts — to pick Francie up and hug her. There was something inexpressibly wholesome and comfortable about this little girl — for so she appeared to him, in spite of her grown-up costume which Mrs. Ducey had had crinolined in the extreme of the fashion, her bonnet with artificial flowers like a young lady's, her brown alpaca pelisse ornamented with those remarkable flutings and quillings with which women decked themselves in those days. Her thick hair was smoothly braided up like Miss Sharpless's; she wore a white collar and a round brooch of black enamel rimmed with pearls, wherein some of the family hair was enshrined after the pious taste of the times. Nathan observed these signs of maturity almost mechanically yet came away relieved by the knowledge that Francie had reached an age when she must count for something in the household — even in a household so despotically ridden as Mrs. Ducey's; and that Nance had her sympathy and understanding. More than ever he felt a man's helplessness before this problem; the thing that looked so simple to the casual view was to him infinitely intricate. Here was an untrained, ignorant, high-spirited girl taken into a good home, fed, clothed, educated, helped, and sheltered in every way — what more could anybody ask? On the face of it, Nance was unusually lucky, the Duceys unusually kind. Yet when he thought of Nance at all — which, I am afraid, had not been often — some instinct shouted in his inner ear that it was impossible for her to be contented or satisfied — farcically and unhappily impossible. George's lively anecdotes, Francie's own reluctant and dubious face, let in a disquieting illumination. But then, why did she stay? He must see her, talk to her, find out for himself. Darnell's memory reproached him.

Alas for these good resolutions! There is a bitter truth in that hard old saying that he that will not when he may, he cannot when he would. Even had Nathan kept his promises to himself, I do not know that he would have accomplished much with his reasoning and his sermonizing and his self-important kindness — but that does not excuse him in his own eyes. One might fancy Fate stepping in to say:

"Sir, you would direct this young woman's life? Nay, but you have lost your chance. You would shoulder this responsibility? Rest easy, it shall be removed. You would keep your promise to her dead father? And why did you not think of that earlier and to better purpose? The time is over-past —" How many men have read themselves this weary lecture? With the best will in the world, Nathan found he could do nothing for Nance now; the first of the year approached and they were ceaselessly busy at the store; and a millstone anxiety about Sharpless weighted him down. For Jim was sick enough now; there was a day when Burke went home from his figuring to find his friend huddled in the bed, chattering strange words with what little voice his cough left him. Nathan (whom the poor fellow looked at without knowing) stood over him, listening with a dreadful sinking of the heart, trying to calm him. "*Je viens revoir* —" "*Dans un grenier qu'on est bien* —" Jim gabbled on with the secret and silly mirth of delirium. The other had only the slightest acquaintance with the language, and: "Good God!" he thought in terror; "will he die this way, without knowing me, without a word I can understand!" But towards morning the fever mercifully abated enough for Jim to come back to reason. "Don't tell Mother, Nat; don't let her get scared about me. I'm all right, I'll get up pretty soon," he said.

There began a season upon which Burke to the end of his days will look back with cringing. The doctor came; Nathan got in a nurse — an old woman who smelled of the whiskey-bottle and was none too clean, but he must have somebody. Burke himself sat up at night; when he could, Jack Vardaman relieved him. In spite of Jim's protest — which he constantly repeated in his brief moments of consciousness — Nat thought his family ought to know. "I've told the old man. I dare say he calls it a judgment!" said the doctor, scornfully. Heavens, what hours did they pass in that dingy room: Jim with his wild face covered with a half-grown beard, turning, turning on the lean, hard pillow; bottles, spoons, linen rags, all the dismal tools of sickness strewed about; the light shaded with one of Nathan's law-books — Somebody on Equity — propped up open around the candlestick; the sallow dawn coming in through the

dirty window-pane. Nat has spent the night sitting up across a couple of chairs; the shabby silver watch, that he bought of the pawnbroker for a few dollars, is open beside him to time the patient's doses, and he rouses with a start to find it five o'clock, and another day — Thursday? Or is it Friday? The town clocks are striking, the milk-carts can be heard in the streets, there is a cock crowing in the stable-yard at the corner; and Jim, turning again, asks for water in his weak voice, and says he guesses he'll get up, Nat — guesses he'll get up — guesses — and make that hump-backed fellow at the foot of the bed stop making faces and go away, confound him! It sometimes seemed to Burke as if he had not slept for years — as if he could not if he tried. He used to go down to his desk red-eyed, but broad awake, and work all day with a steadiness that amazed him when he recalled it afterwards. His head was clear even when his haggard look startled the other clerks. They passed the word around that Jim Sharpless was very low. Nathan heard them buzzing the news in corners with a futile anger. It was old Marsh himself who came to him one day and said: "Go home, Burke, go home — you ain't fit for this. Ain't he any better?" with so much of rough kindness in his manner that the tears came into the young man's eyes. He was almost worn out. He got down from his stool and went to get his coat, and as he did so, Mr. Ducey, coming from the front of the store with an important face, told him:—

"There's somebody asking for you, a lady — um — if I were you Burke, I —"

Nathan went out, dully wondering; and the lady — a little lady in a gray dress — who was moving about nervously amongst the sugar-barrels and bales of hides, put back the veil she wore over her plain bonnet, and came up to him with a piteous pale face and her small hands in shabby gloves held out, fluttering.

"Mr. Burke?" she said with a great effort at calmness. And then in a heart-breaking voice: "My son — my son Jim — won't you take me to him, please?"

CHAPTER XVI

Longer than the Last and somewhat more Cheerful

It was with an immeasurable relief and thankfulness that Nathan took Mrs. Sharpless on his arm along the streets and back to the boarding-house and the room where her boy lay. And whether poor Jim had actually passed the turning-point in that grave journey on which he was embarked, and was on the mend, ever so fitfully and faintly already; or whether his mother's coming decided the event, we never knew; Vardaman himself said he could not tell. But Burke, for one, has always believed the latter; it is hard to think that her presence did not have something to do with his recovery. She was so brave, so patient, so resolutely hopeful; she radiated perseverance and good cheer. Nathan never saw her break down but that one time in the office, nor shed another tear, although the sight of the comfortless quarters, of the nurse (the drunken old wretch was sleeping sprawled out on Nathan's bed in a hideous disorder when they reached the house), of Jim disfigured by sickness, quite out of his head so that he did not recognize her at all, and croaking, "For his spirit it was tre-men-ju-ous —" in a lamentable voice — all this must have wrung the mother's heart. Mrs. Sharpless never made a single comment, nor even looked one; she took off her black bonnet and veil — garments which appear to fulfil every woman's idea of disguise, or the incognito — and sat down beside Jim's bed. And Burke, having turned out the nurse as gently as he could, and fetched Mrs. Slaney (who, indeed, had shown herself all along very willing and well-meaning, and flustered and useless), was made himself to go and take some rest in a room good-naturedly loaned by another lodger. The young man protested; he was quite sure that he couldn't close an eye, — nevertheless he did, in sheer exhaustion, and slept

heavily for hours, waking at last towards dusk with a start and the frightful consciousness of duty neglected. He hurried to the sick room in a miserable tremor, and peeping in, saw Mrs. Sharpless still in her chair by the bed; and Jim asleep, peacefully and naturally asleep for the first time in days. The room was full of the clean winter twilight, red through the west window; the fire burned clear on a tidy hearth; there were white sheets on their two poor iron beds, a white cover over the squalid table. And there sat Mrs. Sharpless, with her soft skirts falling about her, her pretty, sleek, dark hair — there was scarcely a thread of gray in it — her bright, kind face, a book open on her knee — it was the Bible — like, I swear, a little gray angel, an angel of comfort and of healing. She looked up with a smile as swift and brilliant as Jim's own, and laid her finger on her lips, as Nathan crept in. "Hush, the doctor has been here — and he says he's better!" Burke went up to the bed, and looked at the sick man, more moved than he would have had her see; he had not known how mortal was the fear that hung over him until it was a little lessened. And I trust there was nothing unmanly in his emotion, nor in the regard he felt for his friend. Passing the love of woman — ! Mrs. Sharpless took his hand. "Sir, you have been very kind — the people here have told me — the doctor told me — you have been very good —" she said. And that was all; nor was there ever any more talk of thanks or obligation between them. I believe neither one ever thought of it.

Burke did not know upon what terms the Reverend Mr. Sharpless had allowed his wife to come and tend her son. It was not unlikely that she had done so without leave and in the face of her husband's displeasure. "Sharpless senior was a hard old man," Jack Vardaman used to say, shaking his head in wonder and a kind of commiseration; "a hard, stern, self-righteous old man. When I went to tell him about Jim's illness, I felt as I were dashing myself against a stone wall. Possibly I didn't make it clear to him how sick Jim was; he may not have understood. But a man of that temper to preach the Gospel of charity and long-suffering and tenderness! It's cruel and absurd at once. For all that, I could see something admirable in his unflinching consistency; the way he ground down and obliterated every

vestige of fatherly feeling from his heart. Jim was a sinner, in open rebellion against the Almighty — and that he was this sinner's father was an accident which he was determined should in no way influence him. There was a Roman strength of character in the old man; you couldn't but respect him even when that conscientious inhumanity of his angered and repelled you most. It's easy to see Jim came rightly by that iron streak that kept him adhering to his wrong-headed notions. I believe the martyrs were made of that stuff. Old Sharpless was capable of thrusting his hand into the flames, and crying out: 'This hath offended!' When it comes to religious matters, there's a mighty faint boundary-line between persecutors and persecuted; give either side the upper hand and history shows you what will happen. It's a great thing to be able to lay down hope and love and ambition and everything that goes to make life tolerable, and at last life itself for the sake of a conviction. How many of us can do it? I go to church and try to live Christianly; but rather than be burned alive, wouldn't I have offered meat to the idols? I'm afraid so — I'm afraid so! Old Sharpless wouldn't; he would have gone to the stake for his belief. And Jim would go to the stake for his *un*belief — or whatever you please to call it. What difference does it make in the abstract which of them is right? All your prejudices fade before facts like that; you can't help feeling a little admiration and a little pity for both men."

This estimate was pronounced by the doctor years afterwards, when the Reverend Mr. Sharpless had been long gone to his rest under the plain granite tombstone in Greenwood Cemetery, and had found out, perhaps, that that Power whose awful judgments he preached so unsparingly is said also to send rain upon the just and unjust alike, nor lets the sparrow fall unheeded. Nat Burke, to whom it fell to carry to the reverend gentleman the news of his son's continued illness and of Mrs. Sharpless's decision to remain by him, was not so lenient as Vardaman. He thought the elder Sharpless a narrow and merciless old bigot; and went up the path to the parsonage door in a very sour and contemptuous mood. The fact that this same bigot was Mary Sharpless's father weighed no more with the young man than the fact that he was Jim's father; Nat was always able to think of

Mr. Sharpless in a certain detachment, there was so little of the natural man about him. Could he ever have been a boy and played with a top? Or a young man and gone a-courting? There was a quaint impossibility in the notion. A subdued servant-girl came to the door and said the minister was in; and showed Nathan into the study. It was a sombre little place with drab-painted walls, a steel-engraving of John Knox — Calvin — some such worthy, in a narrow, hard, black wooden frame (appropriate enough, Nat thought) over the mantelpiece, and two gloomy black horsehair chairs for the parson and the penitent — for that is what the attitude and atmosphere of this room suggested. It had a monastic look of retirement and discipline. Mr. Sharpless rose from the table where he seemed to have been meditating his Sunday address and taking notes. On the sheet of foolscap lying there, Nathan saw the text written out in the divine's big, black, powerful hand: "Thus saith the Lord: Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord."

"You wished to speak to me, sir?" said the minister, bending on his visitor a look so like Jim's in its straightforward scrutiny that Burke was momentarily startled. In fact, the father and son were much alike in appearance, being both tall, spare men with a probable reserve of strength and endurance hidden under a not very robust exterior. Nathan briefly stated his name and errand, which the Reverend Mr. Sharpless heard without change of countenance, sitting with his hands loosely joined, and his steady eyes fastened on the young man; he had a long, thin, delicate, and nervous hand, the very model of Jim's.

"He has been terribly sick, Dr. Sharpless," said Burke, earnestly, conscious of some impalpable barrier, mental or spiritual, between himself and the other. The older man was not hostile; he was imperturbable, hopelessly aloof. "He is not out of danger yet, although Ja — Dr. Vardaman tells us there is hope — and — and Mrs. Sharpless wants to stay with him —"

"It is natural," said the father, gravely; "I should be the last man in the world to cross that desire, Mr. Burke. My daughter will take charge of the house. I should be much

obliged if you would assure Mrs. Sharpless that — that she has no cause for anxiety about anything here, in short. Ah — who has been attending to James — nursing him, I mean — previous to this?"

"The doctor and I," said Nat, detecting, or fancying he detected, a painful interest underlying these formal words; "he wasn't neglected, Dr. Sharpless. Of course it wasn't anything like what his mother can do for him. I can't tell you how relieved we were when she came. The whole place looks different, and Jim seemed to get better at once."

"I inquired," said the minister, stonily, "because I wish to say, Mr. Burke, that any expenses you may have incurred, whether for doctor's bills, or nurses, or medicines, or your own loss of time, I will, of course, discharge. You will make a memorandum of them, I trust, and let me know?"

"The doctor and druggist will send their bills to you, if you wish it, and if Jim consents, I have no doubt," said Burke, getting up, and it may be implying unconsciously by his manner his inward conviction that Jim never would consent in the world. The other rose, too, arresting him by a gesture as Nat moved toward the door.

"You, of course, must know — you must understand, Mr. Burke, if you know my son and have lived in intimacy with him," said Sharpless, with an effort, "that he has fallen into error — has turned against Divine authority and wisdom in a way I cannot, as a believing Christian and an ordained minister, countenance?"

"I know that you and Jim have had a — a difference of opinion," said Burke, wretchedly embarrassed.

"*Opinion!*" ejaculated the Reverend Mr. Sharpless — and Nathan, for once, recognized that he stood in the presence of an intolerance differing not at all in degree or kind from that which lit the fires of Smithfield. As savagely fanatical as it was, as secure in its own conceit, it rebuked the young man; in comparison the large humanity and liberality of mind on which, perhaps, he plumed himself a little, appeared mere spiritual laziness, lax and feeble good-nature. "*Opinion!*" said Mr. Sharpless again. He laid his hand (so like Jim's!) on the desk beside him, and Nathan saw it tremble. "But perhaps you yourself *think* as he does?" he said with a distressing attempt at irony.

"No, I can't say that," said Burke, honestly, stirred inexplicably by a feeling of pity and sincere respect; "I'm — I'm not quite sure of my beliefs, Mr. Sharpless, but I don't agree with Jim. We don't argue about it — we let it alone. He is my friend — that's enough for me."

"Young man," said the minister, solemnly, "do you call him your friend when you know that his path is the way of hell, going down by the chambers of death? Can you see that, and not put out a hand to save him? Do you call that friendship? Or are not you yourself one of those to whom the Lord spoke through the apostle; 'I know thy works that thou art neither hot nor cold. So then because thou art lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spue thee out of my mouth.' "

"I may be," said Burke, humbly enough; "but, sir, as uncertain as I am — I — I'm not afraid of God.[1] I can't talk to Jim or persuade him — I don't know how, and I wouldn't if I could. I'm no better man than Jim. I think he is the bravest and brightest and kindest I ever knew. Who am I to tell him or anybody what's right or wrong? I'm not quite sure where it says in the Bible something about knowing people by their fruits," said the young fellow, hesitating, and feeling himself, as the other had intimated, a pretty shabby sort of Christian; "but we haven't much other way of judging, it seems to me." And having delivered this unconscionably long speech with a hot color and some stammering, Mr. Burke took up his hat and edged toward the door, devoutly thankful that the interview was ended. In fact the Reverend Mr. Sharpless allowed him to depart without further argument, whether in indifference, or discouragement, or with the belief entertained by some theologians — as I've understood — that he might be saved anyhow through invincible ignorance. Except one other, it was the only intimate conversation — if one may even call it that — Burke ever had with Jim's father; who, nevertheless, remembered the young man's face, and saluted him with a grave and scrupulous courtesy whenever they chanced to meet.

[1] Someone has scrawled in the margin:

"He's a Good Fellow, and 'twill all be well!"

The handwriting is not Burke's, and we cannot identify it. There is nothing to show that the general was at all familiar with Omar.—M.S.W.

Mrs. Sharpless now taking almost entire charge of Jim except for a few hours night and morning, and his condition rapidly bettering, the room assumed a cheerfulness of aspect that warmed the heart. The boots and pipes vanished. It was the lady's own neat skirts and aprons that hung behind the red calico drapery. The white covers stayed miraculously white; there were no rolls of lint on the floor, no dust on the ridges of the furniture. Truly these things had not irked the young men much before, but Mr. Burke noted not without surprise that it was possible to be comfortable and yet keep straightened up — which is the proper technical term, I am given to understand. Jim's mother accomplished these reforms without any kind of talk or bustle, something which must be all but unheard-of for one woman in another woman's house. But Mrs. Sharpless actually made a friend of Mrs. Slaney! She even went down into the slimy, grimy kitchen and cocked little messes for Jim without antagonizing the landlady. I doubt whether Mrs. Ducey could have done it.

"I'm — I'm afraid it ain't what you've been used to, ma'am," faltered the widow, timidly, the first time Mrs. Sharpless sat down to her slatternly dinner-table. Good Lord, that dreadful table — with the red-checked cotton table-cloth — with the fly-blown pewter castor in the middle — with the sticky stone-ware plates — with the fried steak swimming in sepia-colored gravy — with the extraordinary translucent, glistening gray, boiled potatoes! "Everything is as nice as can be, Mrs. Slaney, and I'm sure my boy is very lucky to be in such a good home with such kind friends," said the little lady, gallantly. And the livery-stable keeper from the corner, who was boarding with us just then, stopped cleaning his nails to stare at her across the table. He never swore once during Mrs. Sharpless's stay! Everybody left off abusing the food, and poking questionable pleasantries at the down-at-heel mulatto girl who waited on us. Mrs. Sharpless never said or did a thing in reproof or disapproval; but, indeed, coarseness and vulgarity slunk away abashed from that brave, pure presence. Burke took an absurd and unwarranted pride in the spectacle; he wanted to cry out boastfully: "Look at her! This is my friend's mother. Did you ever see a finer lady, or a kinder heart?"

During this time Nat himself was camping light-heartedly in an unoccupied room of Mrs. Slaney's, which was a "grenier" indeed — up the attic stairs and unplastered, with the walls and ceiling displaying that reverse view of a shingled roof with cobwebbed rafters and the points of ten-penny-nails bristling through, which the young gentleman's previous experience of stable-lofts had rendered not unfamiliar to him. His pallet on the floor was next-door neighbor to a bushel or so of black walnuts spread out in a desiccating mat of hulls; and the odd crannies were cluttered with old shoes, old bonnets, old lanterns, and teakettles out of commission, old broken and banged china and tin-ware and — blush, oh ye virgins, and ye matrons hide your faces! — a weird collection of derelict corsets and hoop-skirts and nameless articles padded with hair and cotton — enough for two or three Mrs. Slaneys, you would have thought. Nathan, who had been a handy, inventive lad in his backwoods days, fashioned a mouse-trap out of one of the hoop-skirts, an engine which he found exceedingly useful in those regions. He borrowed an excitable little terrier of one of the boys at the store; and the time being ripe, went down into the back yard, and let loose his captives under the quivering nose and three-legged, trembling anxiety of the terrier, who incontinently fell upon them and smote them hip and thigh to the great content and entertainment of all the small boys of the neighborhood; and with Jim himself, who could sit up a short while now every day, looking on from the window above and applauding with his weak hands. "Mother couldn't stand the spectacle," he explained as Nathan, reëntering the room, looked about for that lady. "I suppose she was thinking about the widows and orphans. Anyway the first thing I knew she and Mary had disappeared. They are probably sitting with their fingers in their ears and their faces to the wall in some remote corner."

"She and Mary?" repeated Burke, in a mighty inward commotion; "you mean your — your sister?"

"Yes. She's here — didn't you see her? She came in just now. You must have been down in the yard already, though. What's queer about it, Nat? Why wouldn't Mary come to see me? Father wouldn't make her stay away any more than he would mother, you know," said Jim, in that tone of de-

fence which, oddly and inconsistently enough, one might have thought, he always adopted at any criticism of his father except his own.

"I— I didn't know —" stuttered the other, glancing nervously at the mirror; "I — I didn't think — I guess I'd better get out, hadn't I? She'll want to have you to herself, I expect —"

"Get out — stuff! The idea! Here — where're you going, Nat? Don't go away — don't! Hang it, she wants to meet you — she was saying so just a minute ago — and I want her to, too. Look here, you *must*, you know. Here they are back now!"

Mr. Burke, turning a fine purple from head to heels, acutely conscious of the traces of the recent conflict about him, and with a secret dread that his stock was coming unbuckled at the back, executed what was probably the most awkward bow ever performed by mortal man, to Miss Sharpless who that moment came in with her mother. The young lady went up to him and put out her small, slim, cool hand, taking Nathan's big clumsy one with a very frank and winning grace. She lifted to him, under the shadow of her pretty bonnet, the eyes he so well remembered. "You've been so good to Jim, Mr. Burke. I don't know how we are ever going to thank you."

"I — I haven't done anything," said the honest youth, confused and bashful. Nor, in fact, had he; people seemed determined to overrate him; and to the ordinary upright and sensible man I can conceive of few feelings more mortifying than that of finding himself praised and valued for qualities which he knows he does not possess.

"Nothing at all — it's agreed you've done nothing," said Jim, waving his hand. "Come here and sit on the bed, Nat, cold-hearted, niggardly, selfish, unprincipled brute that you are. Let the ladies have the chairs, ruffian. This is our bower, Mary. Don't you admire it?"

"I think it's a very nice room," said Mary, politely. She perched on one of the chairs as daintily as a bird and let her gaze travel about the apartment in unfeigned curiosity. "I never knew how men lived — alone, I mean — before."

"You don't know now," said the invalid, grinning over his haggard face. "Mother's got us all cleaned up — nobody can find anything, so she's perfectly happy."

"I hope that's just your fun, Jim," said Mrs. Sharpless, in a little anxiety. She turned to Burke. "I — I don't want to make you uncomfortable, you know. The pipes are all in the table-drawer, Mr. Burke; it's a little more — more convenient than the mantelpiece, don't you think? And I put your books back exactly in the same places every day when I dust them. I've had a good deal of experience dusting men's books. I haven't changed anything — to speak of, I mean."

"Why, wasn't it like this when you came?" Mary asked her. Mrs. Sharpless made a little gesture and her bright eyes suddenly filled.

"Oh, Mary, you ought to have *seen* it. What do you think? Those poor boys were keeping their coal in a *barrel!*"

"In a *barrel!*" echoed Mary, in a tone of equal tragedy. The young men exchanged a stare of bewilderment. Why not keep the coal in a *barrel?* To be sure it was in a decent-looking scuttle now — as Burke noticed for the first time — but both ladies seemed profoundly moved by this simple incident. If that was the way some of their surroundings struck Mrs. Sharpless, what did she think of others, Nat reflected, horrified.

"And I think it's awful the place you're sleeping in now, Mr. Burke," said Mrs. Sharpless, addressing him energetically. "I'm sure Mrs. Slaney might fix up something nicer than that for you — that horrid hole! I climbed the stair and looked at it the other day. It's a nest of rats and mice — Br-r-r! No wonder you had to trap them."

"Mrs. Slaney! What a name!" ejaculated Mary.

"Is it true, Nat? Where are you? In the cellar? In the woodshed?" Jim cried out, struggling up on his poor, thin, trembling arm. He was quite weak still, and the tears came into his eyes as he clutched Nathan by the lapel of his coat. "Where *are* you sleeping, Nathan? I'm such a mullet-head I never thought to ask!"

"Why, Great Scott, I'm on the third floor and as comfortable as a man can be," said the other, soothingly. "Mrs. Slaney hasn't got a better room in the house. It's a great deal warmer than this." Which last statement was no more than the plain truth, for a brick chimney-stack with two or three flues passing up through the attic at a point where Mr.

Burke could settle his feet against it, he slept in unexampled luxury.

"I don't believe it," said Jim, falling back. "If you're ever sick, I'll get even with you, Nat Burke," he added with a kind of vindictive affection.

The mother looked at them both with eyes of fond understanding; and Mary with an innocent interest which Burke found no less touching and captivating. He thought himself the luckiest fellow in the world thus to be brought into contact with Jim's sister, and sat amazed at this happy fortune. She was everything he had fancied her when he used to sit and dream in the back pew, and watch her at her worship; the realization filled him with content and pleasure. Miss Sharpless presently took off her bonnet and moved about, looking at this and that and asking questions, as artlessly friendly as a child; her head of black braids scarcely came up to Nathan's shoulder; she told him that his shelves were put up as high as for the "sons of Anak," and stood on a chair which he steadied for her with a hand on the seat alongside her trim little feet and ankles in neat gaiters (Nathan could have held them both in one of his great hulking fists!), and took down Blackstone and read out of it with a ferocious emphasis some dictum about women and minors and idiots not being allowed control of their property, with a little shriek of disdain. "I don't like your old Law! Women and idiots indeed — !" she said and made a face and smacked the book to wrathfully. Nathan thought her adorably sweet, simple, womanly. He took her home through the falling dusk, carrying her music-roll; and she clung to his arm where the crossings were icy; he would have liked to lift her over them bodily — or spread down his coat for her to tread upon, like another Raleigh. They talked all the way about Jim, and, I dare say, a little about Mr. Nat Burke, much more than the young man knew, it is likely. He went back to the boarding-house in the beatific prospect of seeing her again shortly on another visit to her brother — and wondered rather scornfully what had possessed Jim to imagine that his sister was in the least bit a coquette. Nothing that Nat could see in her warranted the charge — do we not all know that members of the same family never understand one another, and that brothers are notoriously unfair?

I am uncertain whether at this stage of his career Mr. Burke was an ordinary sentimental young fool, or merely a very lonely boy of a more or less gentle and affectionate disposition. Perhaps he was a little of both. This young man, who felt within him all sorts of pathetic and ill-defined impulses towards things beautiful and good, who, in his simple fashion tried to keep his eyes on the heights, had never known a home or mother of his own — had never spoken to a lady upon equal terms in his whole life before, nor been addressed — except by one little girl — as anything but an inferior order of creature. It never entered his head to complain, or to pity himself; he had a serviceable gift of humor that may have saved him many a heartburn, and he humbly believed (as he does at this moment) that a man may be a gentleman without either name, or traditions, or upbringing, or social recognition, or any other qualifications than a good head and heart. But he was sometimes intolerably solitary in his man's world. He liked work; he liked achievement; he had definite ambitions, a standard not easily satisfied; a purposeful pride urged him on. Yet there were moments when in those moods of causeless but none the less heartsickening melancholy which overtake all young men, he wondered bitterly to what end was all his striving? Who cared what he did, or whither he went, or how he fared? Fame and laurels, or a pauper's tombstone in a corner of the potter's field — it was all one. There was nobody to rejoice in his successes, nobody to champion him in defeat. He pictured himself with sour mirth half a century hence, a rough, hardened, old man like George Marsh, laughed at and fawned upon and feared, full-handed, empty-hearted. He figured with a foolish wistfulness what it would be to have some one who needed him, leaned on him, shared with him — to have some woman worrying over him as Mrs. Ducey worried over her William — over Georgie. In that respect any one of his fellow-clerks or the other young men he knew was better off than he. Some of them were married, and Nathan, with an obscure pang of longing, used to observe them buying toys at Christmas and fireworks for Independence Day. He had been asked to their homes, had even dined there, and met their wives, mothers, and sisters. Alas, too often Mrs. Clerk was a faded, frowzy woman in a soiled morning-wrapper

and the babies cried and squabbled, and there wasn't quite enough pumpkin-pie to go around unless Mama-in-law Clerk refused — which she always did with the air of an early Christian martyr — and the young ladies, Jack Clerk's sisters, were big, bouncing, giggling, loud-voiced girls who made eyes, and squealed: "Oh, now, Mr. Burke!" at everything that gentleman said or did, and accused him of being the *worst cut up!* Yet of so robust a stuff was Mr. Nat's power of idealization that he refused to believe that all homes and "female society" were as these; he thought, blushing shyly to himself, that Mary Sharpless's house would be a different place, and contrasted her manners with those of the Misses Clerk, greatly to the disadvantage of those amiable ladies.

Miss Sharpless — who, nevertheless, possessed an unusual and beautiful pair of eyes eminently adapted to such a purpose — never exerted them after this killing style upon Nat, at any rate. And undoubtedly it did not occur to her to charge so long, lean, sober, and quiet a young man with being a lively rogue such as the term "cut-up" implies. She used, on her visits, to sit sedately and darn Jim's socks, and talk to both young fellows in a strain of frank interest as if they were equally her brothers. Sometimes she read aloud in her pleasant, clear, well-modulated voice, On their walks home, she would question Nathan, gravely, about his prospects; she would listen enthusiastically to his plans, which, I fear, Mr. Burke poured out with very great freedom and detail. She asked him in and played for him, and Nat, to whom music in general was a more or less agreeable but always wholly unintelligible noise, listened in rapt delight! It was fugues and masses and noble solemn chants which Mary performed for him on the jingling old piano — "maybe I'll earn enough to buy a new one some day," she would say with a sigh and a sweet, pensive look. What would not Nat Burke have given to have been able to go straight out and send her a Broadwood grand? How he envied — he, who couldn't tell a jig from a funeral march — the callous little urchins who took lessons from her!

"I suppose she plays you waltzes and country-dances, of course, Nat?" Sharpless inquired one day with a singular and rather mischievous expression.

"James!" said his mother, in a troubled voice, "don't joke. You know very well Mary can't help it."

"Why, I don't see why you're in such a taking about it. Mary could find a hundred justifications in Holy Writ itself. I never heard of a thing you couldn't get some kind of authority for out of the Bible. Hand it here, will you, Nat? Didn't David dance before the Ark?"

"James!" said Mrs. Sharpless again, quite shocked; and Mary gathered her sewing together and rose with a deal of dignity.

"It's all very well for you to talk, Jim," she said in a tone that intimated it was perfectly brutal; and while Burke looked on, puzzled, not at all understanding the little scene; "at least," said Mary, flushing with an appealing glance directed at him for some reason, "at least *I* don't offend my father to his face, and *embitter* his life with *dissensions*, and — and set people gossiping. *I* don't —"

"Of course not. You're entirely open and above-board and act up to your convictions — all women do," said Jim, with exasperating good-nature. "Look at 'em, Nat. They're two of as honest women — Good Lord, Ma, don't look so, I mean *honest* like a *man*, you know — I say, Nathan, they're as honest as any woman ever is, and they haven't told the truth to father for years! They'll look you straight in the eye and lie like a missionary — for your good, you know — to make you happy and comfortable! Yes, Mrs. Sharpless, how do you expect to answer for it on the Judgment Day when the secrets of all hearts will be laid bare? What are you going to say, Madame? It will take two, large, powerfully muscled angels to drag mother on the stand. She will resist. She will cry big tears. 'Lawk, mum, don't take on so! 'Tain't a mite of use, you know. Look out, Mike, easy does it! Don't go for to shove a lady!' says Gabriel. They fall back, Michael respectfully removing his halo to mop his brow. 'What's this prisoner charged with?' says Peter, glowering terribly at mother in the presence of the whole of the First Presbyterian congregation, and all the nations of the earth, including a lot of Hottentots in ostrich-feather petticoats, and South-Sea Islanders in nothing at all. Just think, they'll all be craning and stretching and staring, all the old deacons and elders, partly at mother, but mostly at the South-Sea Islanders —!"

"James!" said Mrs. Sharpless, helplessly; "oh, I know it's awful the way you talk, but somehow you make me want to laugh!"

"Up steps Satan and being duly sworn, deposes that Laura Sharpless to his certain knowledge, and acting — by George, yes! — acting on his advice, has aided and abetted another criminal, to wit: Mary Sharpless, in deceiving one Jonathan Edwards Sharpless (sensation in the sheep gallery), father of James Sharpless (sensation in the goat gallery), into believing that said Mary never plays dance-music, nor performs at any entertainment for the assembled company to dance, such being contrary to said John E. Sharpless's principles and belief, and a godless and heathenish form of amusement. Whereas, in fact, said Mary has been doing it every day for years whenever anybody would pay her, and every man, woman, and child in the town knows it but her father —"

"If you've finished, Jim —" Mary began indignantly.

Her brother sank back among his pillows, and wagged his hand feebly. "At this point, proceedings were interrupted by one of the cherubim falling downstairs," he said, grinning at Nathan. "Never mind these revelations, ladies, Nat doesn't care how many fibs you tell."

It was the truth; Nat didn't care. He saw something touching in this poor little deception rendered necessary or at least excusable by the Reverend Mr. Sharpless's ridiculous despotism. "I — I must do it, you know, Mr. Burke," Mary said to him tremulously as they parted on the rectory doorstep that evening; "we need the money." She looked like an angel as she said it — she *was* an angel, the young fellow thought. Could he but take care of her, she would need neither to work, or to tell stories any more — she should have all her small feminine desires, pretty clothes, and jewels and — and — he strode away with his head full of foolish dreams.

CHAPTER XVII

In which — the Horse being stolen — Nathan shuts the Stable Door

Burke had already returned to his desk while some of the events last recited were taking place; and was a good deal surprised, touched, and pleased at the warmth of his reception. The clerks came and pumped his hands up and down, and thumped him on the back with awkward cordiality; there was a note of genuine feeling in their rough, boyish voices as they told him they had missed him, and asked after Jim. Mr. Ducey welcomed him and made inquiries affably and kindly; old Marsh alone displayed no interest, to the casual view. "Huh, Nathan!" was all he said, looking up over his glasses, as the young man entered, precisely as if he had not noticed his head-clerk's absence at all. An association for any length of time with George Marsh was tolerably certain to correct any notions his subordinates might entertain of their own value and importance; yet Nat thought he detected a degree of trust and satisfaction in the old fellow's familiar grunt; and, in fact, would have been somewhat taken aback at any manifestation of sentiment from him. There was a queer wordless sympathy between them in spite of the wide difference in their years and characters. So that, when Mr. Marsh, laying down his paper and following thoughtfully Nat's actions as the latter made his preparations for work, remarked finally in a tone of elaborate abstraction: "I shouldn't wonder if you'd find plenty to do, Burke. We've had to get a fellow in your place, of course, while you was away," Nathan perceived — what surely no one else would — a kind of amusement, irony, or mischief either in his speech or manner, and turned to look at him questioningly. The other met his eye with a humorous gravity.

"I said we'd had to get in somebody — a new man. Came

and offered himself, here a week or so ago. He hasn't been particularly efficient — but he's a good-hearted chap, Nat; he means well."

"Who is it? What's his name?" Burke asked, puzzled.

"Why, George Ducey, to be sure," said Mr. Marsh; and then, observing the expression of blank astonishment and not a little concern — certainly anything but complimentary to George — on the younger man's face, he fell back in his arm-chair lost in laughter. His heavy sides shook; he had to remove his chew of tobacco; keeping in the meanwhile one small, shrewd, active old eye on the outer regions of the store where Ducey senior was employed with a customer. "Why not George, hey?" he demanded between chuckles, "damn it, Burke, to look at you, one might think you absolutely didn't trust George. You don't seem to cotton to the notion of George keeping your books. By damn, sir, I'm George's uncle, and I don't know whether I like your manners!"

"Why, I — I — of course George is all right, Mr. Marsh," said Burke, trying not to look his anxiety as he opened the ledger — whereat old George only laughed the more. "Only he isn't very familiar with figures, you know. And —" he caught the other's eye, and grinned against his will, "well, it's about the last thing in the world I should have expected from George, and that's the truth," he confessed.

"You're mistaken, sir," said the old gentleman, severely; "George knows all about figures — more than *you* know — more than *I* know — more than anybody knows. There is nothing left for George to learn. If you don't believe it, look at the books. I went over 'em myself every night, and I'm free to say, sir, I never saw anything equal to the way George can keep accounts!" He took out his huge old bandanna handkerchief and blew a sounding blast. "Well, Nat," he added with real seriousness, "the boy did mean well — it's like you say, I never would have thought he'd do it. I'm afraid I haven't always been just to George; and then he's pretty young still — he'll grow. But he *did* come down here — during the holidays it was, too, just after he got back from college — and he *did* offer to do your work, and he *did* try after his fashion. To be sure I don't believe he'd have held out much longer at it — there ain't any perse-

verance or stick-at-one-thing-ness to George — he wasn't born that way — but give him credit — give him credit. He won't get to be President, but he'll keep out of the Penitentiary, I guess." And with this pointed witticism, Mr. Marsh resumed his survey of the market-reports, having had his joke out and mightily enjoyed its effect on Nathan.

From this and sundry other remarks of his it will be seen that the uncle had but a small opinion of the nephew; it would have been hard to fancy two people less likely to agree. The older man never scrupled to express himself plainly; and if the younger did not always set forth exactly what he thought *of* Uncle George *to* Uncle George, he was not, perhaps, the first man who has made an effort to keep on civil terms with a wealthy old relative whose namesake he was and whose heir he might be. Besides George Ducey was endowed with a stout armor of self-conceit, calculated to turn aside the heaviest blows of sarcasm or ridicule — *illi robur et aes triplex!* Strong oak and thrice-laid brass encased this hero. It was seldom that his uncle's blunt shafts could penetrate it; and on the rare occasions when George after repeated assaults did become uneasily conscious that he was being made game of or sneered at, his native serenity — for he was really a most good-tempered and amiable fellow — soon returned. "Uncle George nevah can remembah that I've grown up," he would explain indulgently; "he's getting old, y'know."

George had, indeed, the other men as well as Mr. Marsh informed Burke, come down to the office as soon as he reached home a few days before Christmas, upon hearing of the plight they were in, and gallantly undertaken Nathan's duties; and stuck to his post for a week or more although the work was hard and tedious (or would have been if he had understood anything about it), the office a dull, dark, dirty hole, and the company highly disagreeable to any young gentleman of George's refined and select tastes — to say nothing of the fact that there were a great many gayeties going on at that season wherein he would naturally have borne a part. He contrived to accept some of the invitations, and gave the boys at the store long, minute, and brilliant descriptions of these festivities. He could remember what every one of the girls wore — what he said to them — what they said to him! He used to repeat these arch, witty, or sentimental conversations at

considerable length to an audience of grinning youths. He dazzled you with florid details — waxed floors — candles — mirrors — fancy ices — satin waistcoats — pumps — tulle and spangles — two violins, a harp, and the piano — how richly did these terms resound upon the arid atmosphere of the ware-room! How George did flourish and glitter before the humble gaze of Burke's fellow-workers! His table was piled high with cards; he was besieged with invitations which he heroically refused. His mother thought George was working himself into his grave; she told all her friends about his noble unselfish conduct. "The head bookkeeper had to go home, you know — it's that young man named Burke that used to be our chore-boy — of course you don't remember. But it seems he's living with Jimmie Sharpless now — eh? My dear, don't ask *me*, I don't know anything about them. All I know is that he and Jim have struck up some kind of a friendship and they are living together in a boarding-house somewhere — you heard about Jim being so sick, didn't you? Mercy, yes — didn't you know about *that?* Why, he wasn't expected to live for a while! This Burke young man wanted to take care of him, so they let him go, and then the minute George came home, he said right off without anybody having to coax and argue the way they would with most young fellows: 'All right, father, I'll go right down and take his place.' Just like that, you know, *right off*. 'All right, father, I'll go straight down and do the work.' Well, of course, I know he's my own son, and there's that old saying about every crow thinking its own young one white — but I *will* say I think that was a *lovely* thing for any young man to do, and I'm just as proud of George as I can be. He's hardly been anywhere, and you know there've been dozens of parties, and of course he is asked to all of them — all the girls are after George the *whole* time — but he just wouldn't go while they were so short of help at the office. Jim Sharpless is getting well, they say; wouldn't you think he'd take it as a *lesson* and a *warning?* Dr. Vardaman said he was awfully sick — poor Jim! I made some chicken-jelly and sent it down to him this morning — I don't care how bad he is, I always was fond of Jim, and I can't help feeling sorry for him."

Quite by accident Burke overheard this speech; and I do

not know why it should have lingered in his mind to be repeated after all these years, unless because the incident seems somehow to be interwoven part and parcel with one of the best-remembered (perhaps because one of the most unhappy) times of his life. For his own part, Nathan thanked George warmly, and the latter received the thanks with a smile of faint, kindly superiority. "Don't mention it, Burke. Any time you want help, or would like me to show you anything about the books I'll be most pleased," he assured the other. And Nat settled to his duties with a mingled amusement and irritation; and some shame at his own impatience under George's suavity. "Confound him! Why on earth will he spoil a kind and generous action with his infernal airs? If he has sense enough for one thing, he ought to have sense enough for another!" thought Nathan; and the next time George gracefully approached him for a small loan — "pay you tomorrow, Nat, or Thursday at farthest, if you *could* conveniently to-day? Fact is, I'm hard up this month — Christmas presents, you know — and then, hang it, a fellow has to get out with the boys once in a while, hey?" — I say, when this happened, Nathan supplied him freely, wondering the while at his own eagerness to stand even with George. "I suppose it's a streak of meanness in me," he said to himself with a doubtful smile. He would have lent Jim Sharpless every penny he owned in the world, or borrowed all of Jim's with no such uneasiness. Already they were beholden one to the other for a hundred kindnesses of which neither ever thought to take account. Why should the idea of owing George Ducey a favor be so unbearable? Burke did not dislike him — no one could actively dislike George — but the boy wearied him ineffably with his etiquette-manual manners, his trivial deceptions, his flat, feeble, pompous chatter. A grown man to be gabbling about ball-room decorations and women's clothes! Before the holidays were well over, he ceased to be entertaining even to the young clerks; they tired of those stories whereof George was eternally the hero, they laughed no more at his ribbon-and-lace conquests; they welcomed the announcement that he was to enter upon the career of medicine with humorous relief and with more than one quaint and pointed comment. Nathan asked Dr. Vardaman if it was true that George was to study in his

office, and to his amazement the doctor confirmed it, although with an extremely odd and unreadable expression.

It was at about this time that Burke was again called to the front of the store one day to see a lady — "Gettin' to be kinder popular with 'em, ain't you, Nat? Runnin' after you the way they do after Bay-Rum Pettie, ain't they?" observed the bearer of the summons, flippantly — Bay-Rum Pettie being the title which these profane underlings had bestowed on the heir of the establishment behind his back. "It's Miss Blake this time," he added in explanation; and Nathan, who for a moment had harbored the insane hope that it might be Miss Somebody-Else who had the most beautiful black hair and gray eyes in the universe and moreover played the piano like Saint Cecilia, went to meet her unreasonably disappointed. It was a snapping cold winter day with snow and brilliant fringes of icicles. Outside he saw a sleigh running over with furs, lap-robes, pretty bright-cheeked girls, from which Francie had descended. She stood just within the door, wrapped up shapelessly in a furred cloak — it was Mrs. Ducey's, lined with the squirrel fur — out of which emerged her round face very fresh, rosy, and sparkling in a frame of blown, brown curls. Between her hands, which had a look in loose mittens of being the paws of some charming little animal, she was carefully supporting something done up in immaculate white with a square of note-paper addressed in Mrs. Ducey's slim, correct, Italian handwriting on top. She held it out to Nat with a shy gesture, rather confused and declining the shabby chair one of the young fellows was offering her, among the boxes and kegs. He retreated with a glance which Mr. Burke considered by far too frankly admiring.

"Nathan, Aunt Anne sent this down, and she says will you take it to Mr. Sharpless — she's written a note to his mother — she says you're to be sure and not lose it," said Francie, answering Nat's grin at this characteristic caution with a dimple flashing into view at the corner of her mouth, and disappearing again by magic as she went on soberly: "it's some jelly she's made for him, and none of us knew where he lived, so she says you're to take it to him. And how is he?"

"He's getting on very well," said Nat, accepting the china bowl and napkin gingerly. "He can sit up several hours a

day now, and he'll be able to write and thank Mrs. Ducey, I think. It's very kind of her."

"It wasn't any trouble," said Francie, about to depart, "and — oh, Nathan, I nearly forgot, Aunt Anne says you're not to bother about the things, they're old and you don't need to send them back."

"The things?" repeated Burke, uncomprehendingly. "What things?"

"Why, the bowl, you know — it's cracked, and the napkin is one out of an old worn-out set, that set with the rain-drop pattern, don't you remember?" Francie explained, evidently marvelling at this masculine stupidity. "Aunt Anne picked them out purposely so you could just throw them away without any bother about returning them."

"Why, I'd just as lief," said Nathan, eying respectfully the napkin which was beautifully white and clean and appeared to him a handsome piece of table-furniture in spite of a hole here and there — they had little squares of the red tablecloth for napkins at Mrs. Slaney's and frequently went without altogether. "It's very nice, isn't it? I'll bring it up. I wanted to come up and — and see how Nance is anyhow — I meant to long ago," he added in the defensively apologetic tone he had come to adopt whenever he referred to her, "only Jim's been so sick —"

Francie looked at him startled. "Why, Nathan — why, didn't you *know* —?"

"Know what?"

"Why, Nance isn't — she isn't at the house — she isn't with Aunt Anne any more — didn't you *know* —?" There was an indefinable alarm in her voice; her eyes widened and darkened after a curious fashion they had whenever the child was frightened or apprehensive. Burke noted it absently; he was not surprised to hear of Nance's departure. In nature she couldn't stand it much longer, he had often told himself, and his first feeling was akin to relief. The experiment was bound to end uncomfortably, but at last it *was* ended.

"Where did she go? Back to the country? It's odd she didn't come and tell me," he said.

"Oh, Nathan, didn't you *know?*" Francie reiterated in a voice of miserable consternation, "she — she went away

because she — she *had* to go — she took something of Aunt Anne's — at least Aunt Anne — Aunt Anne *thought* she did —" Francie interrupted herself eagerly. "Aunt Anne says she *knows* — oh, Nathan, I'm so sorry!" Indeed she looked so; her eyes filled; dread and anxiety together clouded her face as she met the young man's gaze. "I don't know why, but we thought of course you knew about it. We thought George or some one would have told you."

"Took something? Took something of your aunt's? You mean she stole it?" said Burke, with dry lips.

"Yes. That is, Aunt Anne is *sure* she did —" said the girl, hesitating in her honesty and sympathy; and visibly almost as much distressed as if she herself had been accused of theft. "Oh, Nathan, it hurts me to be the one to have to tell you! It was that brooch, you know. Aunt Anne's had it for ever so long, she's so fond of it. Don't you remember, it was heart-shaped, an opal with diamonds around it? Uncle Will gave it to her — I think it was when you first came — it was that long ago, wasn't it, Uncle Will? The brooch that Nance st— that Aunt Anne says she st— that Aunt Anne missed the other day, you know?" She appealed to Mr. Ducey, who had come up and stood by, fidgeting a little. There was an abrupt silence. One or two of the boys, somehow scenting trouble, lingered near, alert and listening. Burke, who had been holding the bowl all this while between his two hands, set it down on the head of a barrel beside him, with a kind of mechanical and painful deliberation as if it had been of extreme value. He swallowed before he spoke, his voice sounding strange in his own ears.

"When did this happen?" he said.

"Several weeks ago — month maybe — really I don't quite recollect when," Ducey said, rather irritably and uneasily, pulling his watch out of his pocket, and snapping the cover open and glancing at it and putting it back two or three times over with the air of haste and preoccupation habitual with him during business hours and at the store. "Haven't seen anything of Wilson, have you, Burke? I'm looking for him this morning to close up that deal — let's see, I hope my memorandum agrees with yours in the books —" said William, who was always fussing about with notes and slips and references — "five hogsheads Demerara sugar, and that

lard, you know, let's see — um — er — too bad about the Darnell girl — ah — um —" he walked away nervously, and we heard old Marsh's heavy voice raucously delivering some command in the office in the rear.

"It was the beginning of December — before the holidays — before George came home," Francie said, faltering; "it was just after Aunt Anne was so sick — she — she says that's when Nance — when it happened."

"You mean Nance took it and went off with it?"

"No, oh, no. She didn't go till afterwards — till Aunt Anne found out —"

"Mrs. Ducey saw her take it? Or found it on her?" Burke asked.

"No, *no*. She says she *knows* Nance took it, though, because — because she —" Francie hesitated again; she loved her aunt, and with Francie love and loyalty were one stuff and that a stout sort, innocent of shades or varieties. Yet something in the young man's face moved her to add almost pleadingly in a lowered voice: "Nathan, you know how Aunt Anne is. She's just as *sure*. Nance said she didn't take it — and — and I believed her. I don't think she would steal anything. But you *know* how Aunt Anne is!"

"Nance left the house then? Where did she go?" said Burke, harshly.

"Nathan, I don't know. She got a place somewhere — Aunt Anne heard — but she isn't there any more —"

She shrank a little before his hard eyes, all the color quite gone out of her sweet, earnest face. I daresay this Nathan was a new man to Francie, a forbidding stranger. She was a devoutly obedient nature, gentle-tempered, trusting, wholly ignorant of the world, and it may be that she now perceived for the first time at one stroke, in all its ugliness, what this thing was that had happened, and glimpsed unexpected depths of tragedy. She clasped her two small mittens together in a pitiful gesture. "Oh, Nathan, I'm so sorry, so sorry! Aunt Anne — I wish you could see Aunt Anne —"

"I will," said Nat, sombrely.

The girls were challenging her gayly from the sleigh; and when she went out to join them, there was a gust of laughter and questions and pretty little outcries. The young women doubtless wondered much at Francie's grave face, and were

profoundly amused at the stiff, silent young man who came out with her and helped her to her seat without a word.

The Ducey house was pleasantly lit as Nathan went up the brick walk that evening. Bright shafts of light streamed through the windows, where the Christmas wreaths of holly still hung against the panes — peace on earth, good-will to men, Burke thought with a fierce irony, noting these symbols. He was too ill at ease with his own conscience, too racked by bootless regrets to spare a little charity to others. Why had he ever lost sight of Nance? He could not have kept this from happening, perhaps — he recalled with a bitter humor the hosts of outraged servant-girls whom he had witnessed in the old days, declaiming, protesting, bewailing their unjust lot in Mrs. Ducey's kitchen. No, he could not have prevented it — but he might have tried to keep in closer touch with Nance; if she could have relied on his faith and friendship, she might have come to him, told him, asked his help. In God's name, thought the young man desperately, why didn't she come anyhow? She could not have supposed for an instant that he would believe this wretched charge? Where was she? What had become of her? He had spent the afternoon in fruitless search. It was more than a month — but the town was a small place after all — she must be somewhere in it. He might have thought — he would have been very glad to think — that she had gone back to her old home, to the cabin on the Scioto; but, as luck would have it, he had fallen in, during his inquiry, with 'Liph Williams, come in town for the day's trading; and "How's Nance? Seen her lately?" asked the farmer, cheerfully, among his greetings. "No. Have you?" Nat said with a pang of apprehension. 'Liph thought he was joking and poked him in the side with grins and winks. "Ho, ho, smarty! *Me* see her, hey? It's just like my woman says, Nance'll never come back to th' country, no more'n you ever will, Nat. Town's th' place young folks likes. Does Nance like it up to Ducey's, though? Joe didn't much — Joe, he quit, ye know. He 'lowed Nance would, too, after a spell. Say, you tell Nance we'd be right down glad to see her any time she feels like comin' out. Ye might bring her some day yerself, Nat, if both of ye could git a day off."

Shame tied the other's tongue, forbade explanations. He could not tell Williams the miserable truth. Time enough for that when he himself should have found out something definite about the poor girl, he thought, shrinking. He would not let 'Liph carry this sorry tale out to the backwoods. If Nance herself would not go there with her trouble, was it for him to send it ahead of her? He recoiled from the thought of her name loaded with this accusation passed from tongue to tongue out there in her old haunts, among the men and women who had seen her grow up. They liked her, doubtless some of them would believe in her and champion her; but she was Jake Darnell's daughter, and Nat knew the world well enough to know how ill that relationship would stead her, even among people who were no whit better themselves. Gossip is everywhere ready to announce the solid truth that figs do not grow on thistles, and will be as brisk, as sharp, and as short-sighted in the fields as on the sidewalk.

There was music in the parlor and company. The young men, all of whom knew Burke, and nodded, staring a little, were carrying chairs out into the hall and pushing the furniture back in preparation for dancing. Nat was ushered into the dining-room where the folding-doors were drawn to, and the table set with piles of plates and sandwiches and cake in Mrs. Ducey's handsome silver cake-baskets, and cut-glass saucers of sweets. He knew the room well. There was a mirror over the mantel-shelf and a French clock of bronze with a figure of Galileo seated upon the flat summit of it, and bronze candelabra flanking it at either end, between which ornaments Burke caught sight of his own grim and pallid features as he waited. He could hear Mrs. Ducey's sweet, decided voice on the other side of the closed doors: "George said *right off* —" "Well, of course, I know I'm his mother, but I do think that was a lovely thing for any young man to do —" and an appreciative murmur from the listener. We have heard her already, haven't we? In a moment she came rustling in with her quick unerring step, about which there was a kind of peremptory lightness. She was dressed for the evening in bright silks and laces; her lovely fair face bloomed above her finery. "Well, Nathan, how do you do? I haven't seen anything of you for a long while. It's cold,

isn't it? Come close by the fire, you must be almost frozen."

"I came up to ask about Nance Darnell, Mrs. Ducey," said Burke, without preamble.

"Yes, I know. Francie told me. Wasn't it a pity?" She turned towards him with an expression of genuine distress and trouble. "Oh, Nathan, I've often thought of it since I found her out, you were right when you warned me not to take Nance in the house. You knew her better than I did — you remember you *told* me so, but I just wouldn't listen, when you cautioned me against her. You see —"

"I? I warned you against Nance?" said Nat, in a ghastly bewilderment.

"Yes, don't you remember? Why, surely you remember coming up here and telling me over and over again that you thought I'd better not take her, because I didn't know anything about her and *you* did. The trouble was I didn't at all realize what you meant," said Mrs. Ducey, in almost an apologetic tone, "I didn't understand, and I did so want to do something for her as long as it sort of seemed as if we had been mixed up in her father's death." She looked at the young man with a real appeal for sympathy. "Isn't it dreadful how Nance has turned out after all I did for her? I suppose you thought I was very headstrong, but you really didn't speak plain enough, Nathan; it would have been the better kindness."

"I don't think you understand now, Mrs. Ducey," said Burke, appalled with a sudden sense of the futility of argument. By what feminine process of reason or imagination she had so distorted his own words and actions, he could not even guess, but it erected a wall of adamant between them on the instant, strengthened by Mrs. Ducey's own absolute honesty and sincerity. For a flash there seemed to him a kind of exasperating dulness about it — yet he knew Mrs. Ducey to be anything but a dull woman. "I don't think you understand," he repeated painstakingly; "I never meant to warn you against Nance. I don't know what I could have said that could have given you the idea —"

"Why, Nathan, it's not possible you don't remember?" exclaimed Mrs. Ducey, amazed; "you came and told me yourself she wasn't fit to take in the house — why, you *said*

so — don't you *remember?*" She looked at him helplessly questioning. "What *did* you say if you didn't say that, I'd like to know?"

"I don't remember what I said exactly, Mrs. Ducey," said Burke, despairingly; "but I must have put it very badly, for warning you against Nance was the last thing in the world I should have thought of. I want you to believe that. I had no idea of such a thing."

"Hm! Well, I certainly took it that way when I came to think it over the other day when I found out that she had stolen my brooch," said Mrs. Ducey; "but anyhow there's no use in talking about that now. Whatever you meant to say —and I'm sure I can't imagine what you *did* mean if not *that* — there's no use now. You mustn't think I am suspecting you of knowing anything about it, Nathan," she added quickly and with the utmost kindness; "I see you were as much deceived in Nance as I was — it's so easy for any girl to pull the wool over a young man's eyes. Why, I wouldn't *dream* of suspecting *you*. Don't worry about that."

"Yes, I've lived here on the place, and in the office several years and never stolen anything, though I've had many opportunities, so I suppose my honesty is fairly well established," said Nat, in savage sarcasm.

"Yes. Of course. Whatever I am, I always try to be just and reasonable," said Mrs. Ducey. "We all make mistakes, I suppose," she went on gravely; "I made one about Nance. But you're not to blame, Nathan; I'm sure you meant well. If you had just told me flat you were afraid she couldn't be trusted, it would have been so much better; but I suppose you weren't quite sure, and it's wrong to say things like that unless one is absolutely *sure*. I understand just how you feel." She cast a glance of housewifely concern over the table. "Wouldn't you like a doughnut or something?"

Burke declined, conscious of a bitter comedy in the scene. "Would you mind telling me — you know I only heard about it to-day — how you came to suspect — that is, what made you think Nance had taken your breastpin? How it all happened, I mean?" he amended hurriedly, seeing Mrs. Ducey stiffen at something in the wording or manner of this inquiry.

"There was no *thinking* or *suspecting* at all about it, Nathan," she said with dignity. "I hope you don't believe I

would accuse a person on mere suspicion, or because I just *thought* they had stolen something. Of course, I can't *prove* it — no one can ever *prove* anything of this kind, because that sort of thief is always too smart ever to have it *proved* on them — I simply *know*. I know just as certainly as if I had seen Nance take it with my own eyes — *anybody* would know. It happened while I was sick, you know. I thought it was kind of queer how Nance insisted on being in the room with me, and waiting on me all the time, and not letting any one come near me; and she kept the room so *dark*, you know, and moved around like a cat without the least noise — well, of course when I'm sick I don't like light and noise and a lot of people around me, so that I never suspected at the time what she was up to — and besides I was too sick to notice much. I had my brooch put away — it was that opal set in diamonds — you must have seen me wear it — I was so fond of it —" said Mrs. Ducey, pathetically, her pretty eyes brimming. "Will — Mr. Ducey gave it to me long ago — I'd rather she had taken almost anything than that. That's what I *told* her — it was so *heartless* —"

"You — you caught her with it?" said Burke.

"No — oh, mercy, no! How innocent men are where a young woman is concerned!" said Mrs. Ducey, pityingly; "as if she would have *let* me catch her with it! She was a great deal too sharp for *that!* I ought to have been more careful, I suppose, but I never thought. I remember now she always looked at it so admiringly whenever I put it on, and once she said to me: 'That's a lovely piece of jewelry, it just suits you. What is the name of that stone?' So I told her it was an opal. Then she wanted to know where it came from and all about it — and, Nathan, I was so unsuspicious it never entered my head that she was trying to find out whether it was *worth* anything! She didn't ask a word about the diamonds, because she *knew* how costly they were, don't you see? That just *shows!* Only after I had told her all I knew about opals, I said just for curiosity, you know, without thinking anything, because she did say such funny things sometimes, it amused me so: 'What did you want to know for, Nance?' And she colored up and said just as confused and hesitating as could be, 'They make me think of snow in a hollow with the sun kind of red on it, winter

evenings.' Now did you ever *hear* such a rigmarole as that? Of course she had to think up some kind of explanation right away, and that was the best she could do on the spur of the moment. I ought to have been on my guard, only I never thought at the time. But you see how plain it all is," said Mrs. Ducey, pausing for breath.

"I see," said Burke, heavily. He sat listening with folded arms and head on his chest. Good God, poor Nance, with her awkward tongue, her vague, wild, shy fancies!

"Well, I put away my brooch in the same place I always do, just the night before I was taken sick — before I had to go to bed, I mean. I was feeling miserable for two or three days before that, but I never give up till the last minute. I generally lock up my things, and I'm sure I did that night, but Nance came in and insisted on making me a hot lemonade and fixing a foot-bath, and she helped me undress, and of course she kept her eyes open all the time — it must all have been part of her plan — I shouldn't wonder if she'd been waiting days for a chance —"

"She could hardly have calculated on your sickness or timed her actions so accurately, could she?" Nathan could not refrain from suggesting.

"Oh, my, people like that are just as sharp as nails — you've no *idea!* They have all kinds of ways of doing that honest persons would never think of," said Mrs. Ducey, with conviction. "Of course I don't know *when* Nance took it — I don't believe she took it that night. But she knew where it was and all she had to do was to bide her time —"

"Did nobody else in the house know where it was?" Burke asked.

Mrs. Ducey stared. "Why, you don't suppose Mr. Ducey or Francie would have taken it, Nathan? It was long before George came home — well, of all the absurd —"

"I mean the other servants."

"Oh, the other servants don't count. I only had a woman coming in by the day at the time to wash and iron and do the cleaning, and she always went home at night. And anyway, I always hide my jewelry carefully so that a strange person coming in couldn't *possibly* find it. No, it's no use, Nathan," said Mrs. Ducey, shaking her head regretfully; "I thought of all those things the same as you are doing when I got up after

I got well, and found my brooch was gone, and it was perfectly plain that Nance was the one who had taken it. I felt terribly, Nathan; I hated to think that anybody could be so ungrateful and unprincipled."

"Well, then, you accused her of it?"

"No, I *didn't* accuse her, Nathan. I tried to be kind. I just called her into my room, and told her what had happened, that I couldn't find my brooch anywhere, and I was sorry but I knew some one must have stolen it, and I was afraid I knew the person. And then I stopped and waited to see what she would say and give her a chance to clear herself. I just sat quietly and waited —"

"And she said nothing, I suppose?" said Nat. He got up out of his chair and walked the room restlessly in unavailing pity.

"Why, that's just what she did — said nothing, I mean," ejaculated Mrs. Ducey, in surprise; "but how did you guess?"

"It's — it's the way people act sometimes," said Burke, huskily.

"She just stood there like a statue. And then I said to her just as gently and kindly as I could, because I didn't want to make it any harder for her than I could help: 'Nance,' I said, 'don't be frightened. Tell me the truth. I won't let any one hurt you, and nobody shall ever know about it but myself. I know you were overcome by a sudden temptation when you took my brooch, but you are a very young girl, and young girls love pretty things, and I'm not going to blame you. I just feel sorry for you. Now you bring the brooch back to me, and I promise you I'll never say a word about it to any one.' I don't see how I could have been kinder than that, do you?"

"It might have been kinder to have made sure she took it first, I think," groaned the young man, hopelessly.

"Why, Nathan, I was *perfectly* sure. I don't believe you've been listening. The whole thing is as plain as A B C. Goodness, don't you suppose I'd have been *glad* and *happy* to think that I'd lost it some way, or that some one else had stolen it?" cried out Mrs. Ducey, her lips trembling. "It was perfectly awful — the most awful thing I ever had to go through with. And to find her so *hardened* —"

"What did she say or do?"

"Why, she just kept as still and quiet as a stone — perfectly barefaced and callous, staring at me while I was talking. And then all at once she burst out laughing — did you ever hear of anything so horrible?"

"And then what?" said Burke, setting his lips.

"Well, you know Francie was in the room and Francie *would* interfere — I couldn't stop her. She ran up to Nance and took hold of her hands and began to cry and say she knew Nance hadn't taken it, and she kept saying: 'Say something, Nance, *say* you didn't do it; you *know* you didn't do it!" until she got quite hysterical and I had to make her go out of the room. It was *awful*, the whole thing. So then I tried and tried to make Nance give it back, but she simply wouldn't. Just said once or twice in a sullen way that she never had had it, even when I told her how lenient I was being with her, and how some people wouldn't hesitate to send her to jail."

"After that you sent her away, I suppose?"

"No, I didn't!" Mrs Ducey exclaimed, flushing with indignation and drawing herself up. "I don't know what to make of you, Nathan; you seem to think I'd be positively *cruel*. I wouldn't do a thing like that. She went herself. If she had stayed, I'd have kept on, and showed her how wrong she was, and persuaded her into giving the brooch up — unless she'd pawned it or something, and even then we could have got the ticket and got it back. But you see she was afraid to stay — that *shows* she was guilty; if she'd been innocent, she wouldn't have cared. But she went right off that very day, an hour or so afterwards."

"You don't know where she went?"

"Oh, yes. We heard in a day or two that she had answered an advertisement of a friend of mine — Mrs. David Gwynne — you know, you've seen her —?"

Nathan nodded, pausing in his stride about the room.

"It seems she had been wanting a housemaid, and she recognized Nance at once, and never asked any questions; just took it for granted, she said, that Nance had had some fuss with me and took her right in. She said to me: 'You know, Anne, you're always fussing with your servants!' Marian Gwynne *is* so queer —" added Mrs. Ducey, in parenthesis — "just as queer as if she were really a Gwynne herself — they're all queer, you know —"

"Is Nance there now?" asked Nathan, with reviving hope.

Mrs. Ducey looked shocked. "Why, no, of course not. I *couldn't* leave Mrs. Gwynne in ignorance, you know — my own friend! If it had been somebody I didn't know, it would have been different — but *my own friend!* Why, I just *had* to tell her. I sat down and wrote a note and warned her the minute I heard Nance was in the house."

Burke stood dumb before this exposition of the feminine code. "Then Mrs. Gwynne sent her off, I've no doubt?" he inquired.

"Oh, gracious, yes! You know the Governor's house is full of elegant things, and then Louise — that's her daughter — is going to be married, and of course she has the greatest quantity of clothes and wedding-presents. Marian said it was too much of a risk; she'd rather have the inconvenience of being without an upstairs-girl."

"Have you any idea where Nance went from there? Or would Mrs. Gwynne be likely to know?"

"Mercy, Nathan, of course not! They've been just as busy as can be with the wedding for weeks — it's the day after tomorrow, and they haven't had time to think of anything else. And anyway you couldn't keep track of a person like Nance unless she had the face to go and hire out to somebody else we all knew — but I suppose she didn't try *that* again, as it's three or four weeks now and we haven't heard. I know it's a dreadful thing to have happen, Nathan," said Mrs. Ducey, with real sympathy in her voice; "it must be so hard for you to have a girl that you've known all your life turn out this way. Do you know we thought for a while that you were — were interested in Nance in a different way — a not at all brotherly way, you know — you did so much for her. But afterwards you never came near her while she was here, so I saw it was mere friendship. Still, that doesn't make it any easier for you. But you don't need to worry so. She's perfectly capable of taking care of herself, wherever she is."

CHAPTER XVIII

Contains Sundry Social Experiences

I hope that Burke's grandchildren will never know a distress of mind equal to that with which the young man walked away from the Ducey house in pursuit of his dreary quest. His thoughts beat about in an idle circle of self-reproach, self-excuse. Over and over again he repeated to himself that had Nance come to him (and why had she not?) and had he known all at the time it happened, he still could have said and done nothing to move Mrs. Ducey from her conviction. She was obstinate and merciless as only a truly good and upright woman can be, but to Nathan's youth and inexperience there was something profoundly amazing, even abnormal in this association of qualities. He learned to know the world of womankind better, but at the moment he raged helplessly against what seemed to him a woful lack of logic and humanity and ordinary common sense. To any one who knew Nance, even slightly, it was impossible to believe that she could have stolen this bauble; it was monstrous to charge her with the theft; monstrous to translate the poor thing's astonished silence, her fierce helplessness, as signs of guilt. Nathan, who would have freely acknowledged a man's incapacity to understand the girl, at least understood her better than the good-hearted, ruthless woman with whom she had lived a year. Yet Francie understood her; the remembrance stirred him with a throb of tenderness. He went back to the office, and lit a candle at his desk, and scrawled a word or two of thanks to Francie from a full heart; earnestly entreating her to keep on believing in Nance, and to defend her when occasion came, and to let him know whenever and whatever she might chance to hear of the poor outlaw. He was on the edge of signing himself hers affectionately, when he remembered with a blush and a kind of laugh that she was considered a young lady now, and might very properly resent so much familiarity from him, so that he ended by

being Sincerely, Nathan Burke, and went out and despatched the note with a slightly easier mind.

Jack Vardaman, whom Nathan found at the room when he returned after performing these duties, sitting and chatting with Mrs. Sharpless by the reformed and sightly hearth, eyed the young man closely as he entered, commenting on his worn and weary look. "You're getting thinner, I believe, Nat," he said; "and you haven't much margin in that direction. Heavens, what a beak you'll have! Worse than mine — and that's a hard thing to say of any man's nose!"

"It's taking care of me and sitting up nights," said Jim, and put out his lean fist and pounded Nathan affectionately on the knee. "Just you wait — just you wait till I get *you* down, my lad!"

Mrs. Sharpless laid down her work and looked over at Nathan with a sudden disconcerting acuteness. Her bright face softened inexplicably. "What it is, Mr. Burke — what has happened?" she said quickly and earnestly; "you look so — oh, I *know* something has happened."

"Why, I — I—" stammered Nat, in confusion, a good deal startled and touched by this interest; and then he quite gave way before their three kind, concerned faces, and told them the whole infinitely small and meanly pathetic tale. He had not meant to; but the young fellow hungered for counsel and sympathy; he wanted confidence, wanted help, wanted somebody to listen to his complaints and be influenced by his arguments.

"It's hard to make you understand how I feel about Nance," he said, walking nervously up and down with unusual gestures, all his excitement at last released and mastering him. The little audience watched him with wonder; no doubt there was something almost painful to them in this sudden violence of so silent and reserved a man. "I feel as if it were somehow all my fault — all my fault. I ought to have taken better care of her. I promised Darnell — I meant to. But somehow things interfered — I don't know how it was — time went by — I let it go. On the face of it, you know, it looked all right. Anybody would have said she had a good home — and so she had. Only I knew all along it wasn't the home for her. But what ought I to have done for her? Where could I have put her? And now *this!* Why, it's incredible,

I tell you; I'd as soon call one of you a thief. I wouldn't have believed any woman could be as hard as Mrs. Ducey; she hasn't a shred of proof, not a rag, not a shadow of a reason even for a suspicion — but when she was talking to me there, why, I saw it would take nothing less than an angel from heaven, a miracle, to make her believe otherwise. What's the matter with all the women, anyhow? Why, even Mrs. Slaney, when I told her that a young woman named Darnell might possibly come here asking for me — she said none had — and if she did to tell her that I was looking for her and not let her go away — even Mrs. Slaney looked blank and began to hem and haw, and say she didn't know, and she'd always kept a respectable house! What's Mrs. Slaney got against Nance? I suppose she's heard this wretched story — it's always the way, everybody in the place hears a thing except the person most interested — but she might take my word for Nance."

There was a brief silence after this outburst. Mrs. Sharpless took up her work, and set a stitch or two; then she abruptly put it down. "Well, but are you so *certain* about this — this girl, Mr. Burke? I mean you think you know *all* about her? She's very pretty — I've seen her at Mrs. Ducey's — and I must say she looked as if she might have an awful temper; but, of course, that hasn't got anything to do with *this*. The trouble is it's so easy for a young man to be deceived in a young woman — a *handsome* young woman —"

Nathan looked at her despairingly; he could have groaned aloud.

"Oh, mother, mother, you too!" said Jim, and gave his friend a glance of whimsically commingled humor and sympathy; "you may as well give 'em up, Nat. I believe there never was a woman in this world so good but that she was ready to say another woman was no better than she ought to be!"

"I didn't say that at all, James; you *know* I wouldn't say a thing like that," cried his mother, reddening indignantly, and with her face quivering a little as sometimes happened under Jim's good-nature satire; "I'm just as sorry for the girl as can be. And of course I don't know anything about her character, but I *hope* she's all right. I only said —"

"You only announced a very sound and kindly principle,

I know — I know," said Jim, patting her hand, "never mind what I say; don't feel badly. I'm your angel child, but I'm a brute sometimes, I know it."

"Anyhow, if Nance were the dangerous character all the ladies think she is, she's getting her deserts apparently," Burke said with bitterness, "being hunted from house to house, and now lost to sight utterly! It seems I'm powerless to help her now, whatever I could have done once."

Vardaman got up and laid his hand on the other's shoulder. "Why, Burke," he said with a sort of sensible and kindly sharpness, "don't you see how it is? A young man can't go around taking care of a young woman, a kind of a stray young woman to whom he's not even distantly kin, these days. Knight-errantry doesn't gee with our modern notions of propriety somehow. You've got to be interested in her as a grandfather, or, by Jingo, you can't be interested in her at all! Even the grandfathers aren't any too safe, according to the ladies —"

"Dr. Vardaman!" said Mrs. Sharpless, reddening over her whole face, and rising, "I think I'd better leave you to talk over the matter among yourselves, *gentlemen*, since it seems *I* don't know anything about young women!"

"Oh, don't be foolish, mother," said Jim, pulling her down; "let Jack go on. He's not saying anything improper."

"Now you're not the girl's brother, and I take it you don't want to marry her — ?" went on Vardaman, unmoved.

"Good heavens, no!" Nathan ejaculated in some perturbation, "but can't I —"

"No, you can't — you can't do anything for her," said the doctor, emphatically. "The more you do for her, the more rumpus you make over her, the worse it is for the girl. The world's judgments are hard —" said the doctor, with a perplexed smile — "but the world's a deal older than you and I, and in the long run I don't know but that its judgments are pretty near correct."

"It may be so," said Nat, gloomily, "but nothing I can do now can make her case any worse than it is already. I've got to find her, if she's to be found. I've searched high and low — more people knew about it than I supposed, but nobody has seen her. I even went to the Lauterbachs — they are kind people, they might have taken her in — but they

hadn't seen or heard anything of her. I thought I'd go out to Governor Gwynne's and inquire. Some of the servants might have kept track of her. You know the governor, don't you, Jack? I'd like you to go with me, if you could take the time. It wouldn't damn poor Nance irrevocably to have *two* men looking for her, would it? There's safety in numbers."

This speech was received in another silence so marked that it roused Burke's attention; he caught a swift glance passed between Jim and his mother, and, looking at the doctor, perceived an abrupt harshness or sternness replacing his ordinary genial expression.

"I — I don't think it would do any particular good for you to have me along," Vardaman said at last with an effort.

"I'll go with you, Mr. Burke, I'll go; I know Mrs. David Gwynne," said Mrs. Sharpless, hurriedly; "I'm sure I'd be glad for you to find — what's her name? Nance? I'd be ever so glad if you could find her. I'd like to help you."

They made this visit to the governor's house — which was at an unconscionable distance from town with a grove of trees and a park of its own, in a species of lofty and handsome seclusion — in a carriage which Nat got of our acquaintance the livery-stable man; and for which, by the way, that gentleman refused a cent of hire, as soon as he heard that it was meant for Mrs. Sharpless's use. "You tell that little lady that she's welcome to the best I've got any time she wants it," he said gallantly; "she's a mighty sweet little lady — pretty eyes, ain't she?" he further remarked with quite a sentimental sigh. "You just tell her she can have anything I've got any time she feels like it — the parson can preach it out at my funeral, I guess, if he lasts that long," he finished with a grin. Burke regaled him with segars and a glass of something hot at the Erin-go-Bragh (what would Mrs. Sharpless have said if she had known *that?*) as a slight return for this courtesy and rehearsed the incident to Jim afterwards, consumed with laughter, notwithstanding the seriousness of the moment. "Why, what a dreadful little heart-smasher Ma is!" said Jim, in pretended horror; "goodness, it's immoral! I'm afraid Mary gets her abilities by direct inheritance."

"I don't see why you persist in saying things like that

about Ma — about your sister," said Burke, resentfully; "she can't help being — being attractive — she's not to blame if the men — if they hang around her. She — why — she — the men can't help it either."

Jim looked up surprised at the other's warmth. "Why, I'm not saying anything against Mary, Nat," he expostulated reasonably; "lots of girls are flirts — why shouldn't they be? They haven't got anything else to do. It doesn't do any harm. You seem to think it something disgraceful."

"It might break some poor fellow's heart," said Nat, coloring as he gave utterance to this sentimental theory, but sticking to it manfully, "lead a man on, and let him hope all sorts of things, and then throw him over at the last! If I had a sister, I wouldn't think or say that she'd do a thing like that."

"Pooh!" retorted the other, good-naturedly cynical, "it's not very often so serious as that. Men may die and worms may eat them — but not for love, you know. You must have been reading some of these infernal mush-and-milk stories in the magazines — Graham's or Godey's. By George, I've got so I never read any of 'em any more, unless they're by that fellow, that Poe — E. A. Poe, you know — the one that writes the curdlers. I met a man once that knew him," said Jim, not without reverence, "a fellow that was out here writing for the *Cincinnati Gazette*. He says Poe drinks like a fish. But drunk or sober, he's a *writer*. As for your broken-heart business, Nat, you may trust me there aren't many of 'em outside of the novels. I know one man — but then," Jim pursued thoughtfully, "it's not quite the same thing with him. He and the girl had a fuss, and now she's going to marry somebody else, and I don't think he'll ever marry. He'd laugh at the notion of his heart being broken — but he'll never get over it, just the same."

On their way out to the governor's, Mrs. Sharpless, who, it was obvious even to Burke's masculine senses, had on her best black silk and her bonnet with the thread lace veil, and was in a little state of tremor and excitement, confided to him that she was afraid they were making their visit at a most inopportune season. "You know Louise is going to be married, Mr. Burke. She's going to marry Mr. Andrews — Leonard Andrews, not Charlie — Leonard is the wealthy

one, you know; that is, he'll have money, old Mr. Edward Andrews's son. Charlie hasn't got anything, and then he has to take care of his mother and sister —"

"I know," said Burke, absently, "I see a good deal of both of them. Leonard's in the bank, and Charlie's with Lathrop's commission-house right next door to us."

"Yes. Well, it's Leonard that's to marry Louise Gwynne, you know. The house will be all torn up. Bishop McIlvaine's going to marry them, and it's to be a home wedding—"

"Well, ours is only a business visit, and they're not to have the wedding till to-morrow, are they? They surely won't be inconvenienced the little time I'll take. I only want to ask the servants a few questions," said Burke, staring out at the doleful winter landscape, and wondering dejectedly where in that waste of melting snow and slush, dreary streets, tumbledown shanties, and sodden fields — they were trundling slowly through the outskirts of the town — Nance might be hiding herself. A thaw was setting in with thin persistent rain and a spiteful wind. The roads were ankle-deep in semiliquid mud; the sky hung low and looked like dirty white cotton. Just ahead a covered van laden with chairs and tables and crates of crockery was stalled in the heavy going, and the men in charge had got down and were cursing and bawling and heaving at the wheels and the horses were straining on the yoke. According to the weather, Miss Gwynne's wedding was an ill-omened venture.

"Those things must be meant for the Gwynne house," said Mrs. Sharpless, alertly; "mercy, what a time they're having! It will be awful for all of us driving out to the wedding, won't it? Such a pity! Mrs. Lucien Gwynne is going to stop for us, and take Mary and me out in her carriage — we're lucky, aren't we? It's on Mary's account, of course," said Mrs. Sharpless, smoothing her gloves with that little self-effacing air of pride and content common to mothers; "Mary's going to play the wedding-march for them — when they come in, you know. I believe Mrs. Gwynne wanted to have fiddles and a harp — those men that play for all the big dances, you know, and the subscription-balls — but Louise said she wouldn't have anybody but Mary Sharpless. They've always been friends."

"Miss Mary plays beautifully," said Burke, interested at once; "I should think they'd be proud to have her."

"Yes — of course *I* think so. She won't play for the dancing afterwards, though, Mr. Burke," said Mrs. Sharpless, hastily; "they've hired the men for that."

"It's a shame she has to play at all — it's a shame for her to have to work, anyhow," growled the young man, wholeheartedly.

"Why, she don't *have* to, Mr. Burke," said Mrs. Sharpless, with a startled look. "What made you think that?" And she explained that Mary only did it for "extras and a little pocket-money." The intelligence surprised Mr. Burke not a little, as he had somehow got the idea that the daily bread of the Sharpless family depended almost entirely on Mary's exertions. The young lady could not have told him so herself; certainly Jim never had; it must have been Nat's own dull guesswork.

"So funny, Leonard Andrews is so musical, and used to come to our house so much to sing with Mary and hear her play. And here he's going to marry Louise Gwynne and she hasn't any more voice than a crow, and doesn't know one tune from the next! So funny the way people marry, isn't it?" said the mother, pensively. "Louise is considered very pretty in spite of that fiery red hair — and *I* don't think that's such a blemish," she added with a heroic generosity. "She was engaged to Jack Vardaman for a while, but she broke it off."

"Oh!" said Nat, suddenly illuminated.

"Yes. I saw you didn't know about it. Poor Jack! Maybe it's better so, though — marriage is such a lottery," said Mrs. Sharpless, unable, kind and sweet woman as she was, entirely to suppress her lurking conviction that maybe Dr. Vardaman might have drawn a blank. Burke listened, momentarily forgetting his errand, with a feeling oddly compounded of relief and anxiety. He was outside the bright little social world in which Mary revolved; a dozen young men might be laying siege to her, and he would be obliged to stand by helpless in his pride and poverty. Yet surely she looked at him kindly sometimes. He wondered, in his adoring admiration, what miracle had kept her single thus far — yet what man could be good enough for her? Nat

humbly allowed that he himself was not; if he had had money and talents and everything the world values to lay at her feet, he would still be unworthy of her, the young fellow thought. This humility did not prevent his hearing with a throb of satisfaction that that overdressed dandy, Leonard Andrews, with his voice and his musical tastes, forsooth, could not win her. Andrews was really a good-looking and amiable young man, and Nat had not thought of him with enmity before; but even in defeat the fact that poor Leonard had possibly been one of the candidates filled Burke with a kind of triumphant dislike.

The ex-governor's residence, which was a great, dignified, imposing place, with huge pillars and high ceilings and very rich furnishings in the fashion of the day, was "torn up" to a degree that threw Mrs. Sharpless into a feminine ecstasy. Men were erecting a tunnel of awning over the front steps; there were step-ladders and chairs everywhere; and a rather pretty little girl — red-haired, too — whom Mrs. Sharpless called Harriet, and who, I think, was the governor's youngest child, came running to the door, very happy, important, and excited, and led the visitors in, chattering meanwhile in her high childish voice. She didn't know whether they could see Aunt Marian — everything was *so* torn up, and they were all *so* busy, but Papa was upstairs in the study — and oh, Mrs. Sharpless, just look what the men were doing to our parlors! They were, in fact, spreading down acres of floor-cloth and others were marking out upon it with red chalk certain mystic characters which, Mrs. Sharpless informed Nat delightedly, were "the figures for the wedding-quadrille, you know, Mr. Burke; the bride's quadrille, when the bridal party open the ball." They eyed them respectfully. An artist in a square white cap was devising the most extraordinary edible monuments for table decorations, in a big pantry opening into the dining room — pyramids of oranges divided into their sections and each section crystallized in a sort of sugar frost with a shimmering web of clear, golden, floss-like spun candy piled in a cone-shape over all. "The table's going to be elegant, isn't it?" breathed Mrs. Sharpless, entranced before this masterpiece. "Are there going to be *two* of those beehives?"

"That ain't anything," shrilled little Harriet, excitedly,

hopping on one foot; "you ought to see the ice-cream moulds; I've seen 'em. They're going to have two turtle-doves with their beaks together sitting on a platter, and a boat, a big, *big* boat all out of ice-cream in a dish with waves all 'round it, and the waves are wine jelly underneath and whipped cream on top, ain't they?" She appealed to the caterer, who nodded, grinning. "And there's chicken salad and tongue and ham and sandwiches and — and coffee and cake — and oh, *her* cake is all white with flowers and hearts on it, and *his* has got laurel-leaves, and we're all going to have a piece to sleep on!"

Mrs. Gwynne, a plump, worried little woman in a figured cashmere morning-gown and large jet ear-rings, with her lace cap awry and a shawl shrugged about her shoulders, came shivering in from the side-porch, where she had been giving some order, and stared when she saw them. She stared harder when Burke was presented and his errand explained, which Mrs. Sharpless did in a manner that suggested, "Well, I know he's a perfect nuisance, but I couldn't *help* it. And after all the poor fellow means well. He's nothing but a *man*, you know."

"Oh, yes, I remember the young woman — but really I don't know anything about her, Mr. — ah — I don't know where she went from here, I haven't had time to —to bother, you know — it's very unfortunate, of course," said Mrs. Gwynne, with her eyes everywhere except on Nathan. "Harriet, run and tell them they are *not* to undo that china on the porch, it makes so much muss; that will be the fifth time to-day I've had it swept. Of course, you can ask the other servants; they may know something. Mrs. Ducey's letter gave me to understand — oh, be careful, please, you'll knock into the chandelier — and, of course, you know, Mr. — ah — after what she said, I hadn't really any choice, I simply *had* to dismiss — oh, mercy, I don't want the piano in that corner — excuse me a minute, please, Mr. — ah — I told you distinctly I wanted it in *this* corner. There wouldn't be any room for Mary to sit down, if they ran it back that far, would there, Mrs. Sharpless?"

"Why, I don't know," said the other lady, following Mrs. Gwynne into the drawing-room whither she had dashed, and calculating with her head on one side. "Yes, there might

be — only her hoop, you know, they take up so much room —"

"There's to be a screen around it, so nobody'll see her playing — still it wouldn't do for her to be *too* squeezed up —"

They remained in consultation, while two able-bodied gentlemen in shirt-sleeves, breathing deep and anon wiping their two several brows with two Isabella-colored handkerchiefs, wheeled the piano backwards and forwards according to instructions. Burke, stranded in the dining room, felt himself with some impatience utterly forgotten in this petticoat world. He waylaid a passing maid-servant and was proceeding to his inquiries when the young woman interrupted him — she really didn't know — she'd tell Mr. Gwynne — he wanted to see Mr. Gwynne, didn't he? If he'd just wait a minute — she had to unpack them plates and tumblers — she, too, was gone, and Mr. Burke was beginning to wonder desperately if he had not better canvass the kitchen and rear premises without leave or warrant, when the master of the house appeared.

To Nat's huge surprise, Gwynne (who himself wore rather a neglected and, as it were, second-rate look, and it presently appeared, had come downstairs in search of coal for his fire, which everybody had forgotten!) remembered him, and shook hands, calling him by name, and referring to their previous meeting with labored geniality; and heard Burke's apologies and explanations with an effort, at least, to seem interested. It is likely that the old gentleman, like Nathan himself, felt a certain comfort in the transient company of another male being; there was a humor in the situation not wholly lost on the governor, although he was by no means of a humorous turn. The Honorable Samuel Gwynne was ordinarily a chilly, dignified, impersonal sort of man, whose unfortunate manner, people said, had militated strongly against his political success. He was never popular, though nobody could have made more conscientious or painful attempts at all the arts of popularity. Even young Burke, who came to know him well in later years, and to appreciate all the governor's sterling and manly qualities, used to wonder with a kind of puzzled pity at his perfunctory suavity.

"I feel that this is a gross intrusion," the young fellow

explained, "but you understand in the circumstances it is imperative for me to find out whatever I can at once, without losing any more time —"

"Certainly, Mr. Burke, certainly," said Gwynne, with a strained heartiness, "I'll have all the servants in. You can question them at your leisure — there is really no need for all this confusion, but the ladies —" he waved his hand. And the cook and sundry others — some half-dozen in all — being forthwith summoned, the examination began.

Burke had not had much hope of it; one of the maids was newly come and knew nothing about what had happened. The cook, who was an elderly woman, quite tigerishly respectable and of unimpeachable manners, really never had had any opinion of the Darnell girl, and she wasn't at all surprised the way things had turned out, for she had said to a friend right at the very start, "You mark my words, Maria, that Nance young woman will bear watching. That sort's too pretty for their own good." Hadn't she said that, Nora? Didn't you hear her say that to Maria? It was the day they were making the mince-meat, she remembered just as well, saying to Maria, You mark my words, there's something wrong with that Darnell girl. And if the young gentleman didn't mind her saying it, seeing she was old enough to be his mother, it's very easy for a girl — a *pretty* girl — to take in any young man —! Only one of them, a slip of a girl in her teens whom they called Hannah, and who had a kind, homely face, burst out crying with her honest, soapy red fists in her eyes, and said she liked Nance, she did! And she didn't believe Nance had never stole nothing, she didn't! And Nance hadn't said where she was going because, Land! the poor thing didn't know. But she, Hannah, had told her to try for a place in a boarding-house. "They ain't as pertickler as ladies, you know, sir, because it's hard for 'em to get any help at all for a boarding-house, on 'count of the work," said the youngster, with a naïve shrewdness.

And this was all. No, not quite all, for Burke's ill-timed visit to Governor Gwynne's had another result which ever afterward appeared to Nat as the final stroke of irony with which the Fate, whose province it was to direct his affairs, dismissed this mean tragedy of Nance Darnell.

"Will you have a drink, Mr. Burke?" said the governor,

after the inquiry was finished. "Marian, you and Mrs. Sharpless had better take a little Madeira, hadn't you? Sir, you handled your — ah — your witnesses, as I may call them, with quite a court-room manner. You have the right idea. Never bully a witness; engage his confidence and you'll get infinitely better results — that has been my experience. Help yourself, sir," said Gwynne, affably, and poured out, for his own part, the weakest mixture imaginable, which he sipped slowly and with no particular gusto. Old Mr. Marsh told Nat afterwards that Gwynne disliked whiskey, and had been obliged to cultivate conviviality like one of the fine arts. "You — ah — you are studying law, I understand, Mr. Burke?"

The young man colored and stammered as he said yes, and answered the governor's leading questions at large; he was highly flattered by the old politician's notice, whether it was prompted by genuine interest or not; and blushed afterwards when he remembered how freely he talked about himself and his work.

"I heard so from my nephew Gilbert, whom I have with me in the office, as I have no doubt you know. He tells me he has met you several times at the Court-house," the governor continued with that civility, which, try as he would, was entirely devoid of warmth.

"Oh, yes, I know Mr. Gilbert Gwynne," said Burke, wondering privately if it would have been possible to have lived a day in our city and not known some member of the Gwynne family. The connection was very large, and every one of them abode — more or less — in the shadow of the governor's wing.

"Yes. What you say about your private studies interests me greatly, Mr. Burke — it reminds me of my own young days. My youth was — er — without many advantages," said the governor, sipping his weak punch in a modest way; "as I look back now, I may truthfully say I am glad of it —" and he added some handsome phrases about "Republican simplicity," "the dignity of toil," and "the delights of difficult, honorable achievement," which, Burke thought, bore a striking resemblance to the peroration of the governor's speech in support of Harrison during the last campaign. Gwynne's own large family of boys were growing up a reck-

less, untamable set, who never showed the least desire to work, and of whom everybody prophesied an evil end. "It would give me sincere pleasure to be of assistance to you, Mr. Burke. If opportunity occurs, I hope you will remember that I am always more than pleased to have any earnest young man read in my office, and to give him the benefit of my long acquaintance with the theory and practice of law. I am an older soldier, sir, not a better. *Ingenuas didicisse* — I dare say you can supply the rest," said Governor Gwynne, very elegantly. And the carriage was called, and we drove away.

And this was the sole and most unlooked-for outcome of Nathan's search! For if it had not been for poor Nance's misfortunes, — misfortunes which, right or wrong, Burke always laid in part at his own door, — he never would have gone to Governor Gwynne's, never have met that statesman in this domestic intimacy and familiarity, never have been offered a place in Gwynne's office, a corner of his ægis. I dare say Mr. Burke could have got along tolerably well without, and cut just as notable a figure in the world. He rested content not to aim very high, but to hit where he aimed; and no doubt these events which seemed to him so momentous were trivial enough after all — hardly worth recording even for his devoted grandchildren, who will feel it a pious duty to read through all the old fellow's prattle. Yet every man's life is made up of these infinite smallnesses, and where would the sea be, pray tell, but for the multitudinous drops of water?

CHAPTER XIX

In which the Bar receives a Notable Addition

Nowadays I feel a shock of surprise, a kind of feeble wonder, when I remember how great and despotic was the part played by Time and Distance upon this planet when Nathan Burke was young. Men's means of getting about were no better than they had been in the Dark Ages; it was ten years before that beneficent instrument, Morse's telegraph, clicked its first message for us; the roads, for the first two months of the year, were in such a state that Legislature and the circuit courts never sat during that time, it being impossible to reach the capitol, or anywhere else; we had to pay to take our letters out of the post-office, and used to send them privately by any friend whom we could suborn. Senators and Congressmen got theirs through under a "frank," and lucky was the man who knew one of these law-givers. When, as not infrequently happens, I hear some member of my lessening staff of contemporaries lamenting the good old times, I mildly recall these drawbacks to his mind. And Jim Sharpless is in the habit of remarking that the only good thing about the good old times (in his observation) is the indisputable fact that deer-meat was only seven cents a pound!

But, taking these things into consideration, it is not surprising that every effort Nathan made to find the poor girl he had promised his old friend to protect and care for, failed; the search had begun too late. The young man spared no trouble in his unavailing anxiety and regret. He informed the police; he put — with an intolerable shrinking — a little notice in the corner of the paper, the *Journal*, which came out only once a week during this slack season, although it was a tri-weekly and even a daily whenever the Legislature was sitting or anything of importance was going on; he pried into all sorts of likely and unlikely places, followed up two or three false clews, sought amongst the dregs with less

desire to find her than unspeakable relief at not finding her; and at last went one day with a stricken heart to view a body which had been hauled out of the Scioto a mile or so below town and conveyed to the coroner's. "Th' ice has kep' her real good," one of the officials informed him; "you kin reckonize her easy — her features is all there. They fished her out — she'd floated to th' top, of course — at a bend, y'know, where they's a kinder back-water that swep' her up agin th' shore. She's got on a blue waist — did your girl have on a blue waist?"

"I don't know," groaned Nat, in a choking apprehension. But it was not Nance; the poor creature in the blue waist was a much older woman, with gray hair clinging to her awful discolored temples; and they buried her, next day or so, in potter's field.

It would be claiming too much to say that this sad thing shadowed Burke's spirits permanently, or even for a very long while. There is no sorrow, no suffering, no calamity in Life's bestowal which we cannot bear tolerantly, and to which we cannot, by some hook or crook, adjust ourselves. If you and I were forever to be dwelling on our losses and failures, on death and disappointment, this world would be a dull and doleful place. We may as well make up our minds to it, no action is long regretted and nobody is much missed. *Les morts vont vite!* It's well they should; it's well we should have our grief and dismiss it, and go about our business of living as best we can. Come, let us be plain; I have lived awhile, and setting aside young children, I have yet to know the person whose return after half-a-dozen years — or months! — of death, would not occasion a great deal of inconvenience, and even some scandal. Why should it not be so? We must live, we must scratch along somehow, and it's no sin to forget. Nat was young; he had his way to make; he was not of a despondent, brooding, or impressionable nature. He had, I think, a good heart, and was steadfast in his friendships and beliefs; and if he had done wrong, he tried his best to repair it. But, finding that it could not apparently be repaired, perhaps the young man is not to be blamed for finally ceasing to think about it. All this while he was diligent at his daily work, and, as usual, did not take many people into his confidence. Nobody wanted to know *his* troubles, he used to

think, with a kind of laugh; they were too busy telling him their own. And it was only to Sharpless and old Mr. Marsh that he rehearsed Governor Gwynne's unprecedented offer.

"I can't think why he did it," he told the old dictator at the store, openly; "he didn't need to the least in the world. I've always understood he was very kind to young men just starting out in the law — but I didn't suppose he'd be *that* kind. I think perhaps he just felt rather kindly towards everybody about that time — what with this wedding and all — and worked off a little of the good feeling on me. Probably he'd have done the same for anybody that came along, so there's no need for me to get cocky about it, I guess. I don't want to presume on it; I was a little uncertain whether I'd better take him up, or not (it would be a big thing for me, you know, to study in his office, I — I'd like to mighty well), but I met Gilbert Gwynne the other day, and he spoke about my coming there. So I'm going up every day now at the noon hour, or in the evening, or any spare time I happen to have. There's a couple of other men in the office — Archer Lewis, and that cousin of the governor's, Steven Gwynne, the one that's a little queer, you know, and Gilbert and myself. I find I'm about as far along as the rest in some ways and a little behind 'em in others, and I've wasted a lot of time studying things that won't ever do me much good — I didn't know, you see. But I guess any sort of study is good for one. The governor's very pleasant to all of us; he doesn't come down every day. I've only seen him once or twice since I've been going. Gilbert says he thinks his uncle means to relinquish the practice gradually, but he's always been a worker and he hates to let go altogether."

"Huh, that ain't all there is of it," said Marsh, acutely; "I know Gwynne pretty well — I've known him for twenty-five years. He don't give a damn for the law-practice now — he's made his money. He just holds on because he can't bear to give up and set back out of the public eye, as you might say. He knows if he retired from practice, and left the office and kind of settled down out at that big place of his, why, he'd be forgotten in three shakes of a cow's tail. There ain't anything to it for him but to sit around where people can't fail to see him. He talks about being 'out of politics' — all bluff! He's just as keen as ever after notice and

popularity; there ain't hardly any kind of nomination, except for Police Judge, that Sam Gwynne wouldn't take. I ain't running him down, you know. He's a smart man and a good lawyer, and as honest as the run of politicians, I guess. But, Nathan —" said the sage, giving his companion a sharp glance out of eyes which seemed to have grown smaller and more deeply bedded in wrinkles than ever of late years — "Sam Gwynne's a disappointed man. He's never got to where he wanted to."

"Why, he's been governor of this State twice — two terms!" interposed the other. Old George put that fact aside with a slighting gesture.

"Yes, I know — but he'd have liked to work up a little higher, and he's never quite been able to. People might *trust* him, but, by damn, they don't *like* him enough. He hasn't given up hope yet; he's always making some move for popularity. But he's a cold man; people can see it's all put on with him. To be sure it's all put on with the rest of 'em — kissing the babies, and shaking hands with the boys, and borrowing Pa's pipe for a smoke, and telling the woman he never ate such stew and dumplings — but Gywnne can't act it well. He pumps it up and they know it. He'd do better not to try so hard."

Burke listened with an odd discomfiture. In spite of all his fine disclaimers, and in spite, too, of that very artificiality in Governor Gwynne's manner which Nat himself had detected, the youth had cherished a secret belief that something noteworthy about him had drawn the governor's eye. It was not very agreeable to be informed in cold blood that he was after all nothing but a pawn on the board, that to "clinch the young men's vote," and never let slip a chance to get "hand-in-glove with everybody, no matter how insignificant" (I quote Mr. Marsh) was a recognized manœuvre in the game. Nat had to smile at his own conceit. It is so hard for an honest man to be honest with himself, I think we should take more pity on the rogues. When I announce that I know I'm not handsome, why, damme, sir, it's your business to demur. What d'ye mean by acquiescing with that cheerful grin? I'd just as lief confess that I'm not clever, but *you* tell me so, and I'll have some ado not to knock you down!

"Gywnne worked pretty hard this last campaign, for a man of his age," said Marsh (who was at least ten years older); "and he had a right to expect something. He'd have got something, too, I haven't any doubt; but here within a month after the inauguration Harrison dies and Tyler comes in, and that knocks Gywnne's chances flatter than a busted balloon. He's not a personal friend of Tyler's, like he was of Harrison, and he can't bring any pressure to bear on him. Hard lines, ain't it?" concluded the old man with a sort of cynical sympathy. Was there a creature on earth in whom George Marsh believed? What kind of a world must that be, Burke wondered, in which Marsh passed his niggling, huckstering, striving, doubling, planning existence? Friends, home, a wife and children, were left out of it; trust and affection were left out of it; he might have had these, yet not been happy, and in fairness it ought to be said that he never seemed unhappy. We are so fond of that splendid moral spectacle of Dives sitting lonely and friendless and bitter-hearted at his great rich table, and Lazarus humbly happy over his porridge with a wife and seven children, not a penny in his ragged pockets, but content in his soul — I say we are so fond of drawing this pious contrast that we are liable to overlook the fact that the shoe is sometimes on the other foot. I should not be surprised to find out that Lazarus is not infrequently a selfish, mean-spirited, lazy, blatant cur enough; and Dives a hard-working and generous old gentleman, notwithstanding the luxuries with which he has had the bad taste to surround himself.

"I wouldn't be in Gwynne's boots for a good deal," Nathan said to his friend Sharpless afterwards; "he can't do anybody a good turn without some one hinting he has an axe to grind. It's sad; you'd like to believe in him and people won't let you. I never have felt any leaning towards a political career, and now I feel less than ever."

"Oh, bosh! I believe he *has* taken a fancy to you, and really likes to have you in the office. Take him at his face value — you don't lose anything by it," said Jim, warmly. He had a stanch faith in Burke's winning gifts and personality.

Jim was up and about now, and back at his queer, random, nondescript work of journalism long before this, the sight of

him in renewed health having been welcomed by his motley crew of acquaintances with a fervor that both touched and gratified; and these latter, under Jim's energetic leadership, had been of no slight assistance to Burke in his inquiry. Their quarters were a little lonesome without his mother's kind and gracious presence. Mrs. Sharpless had gone back to the parsonage. And Miss Mary Sharpless no longer appeared of an afternoon, daintily picking her way along the squalid cobblestones, lighting the dingy precincts like a star (this is what Mr. Burke poetically fancied, but prudently never said), passing through the rabble of livery-stable hands and coarse suds-splashing women, and dreadful dirty little rowdy boys, and flea-harassed dogs, and desperate slinking cats, and weird, witch-like, scuttling hens — passing through untainted and serene like the Lady in Milton's poem, Burke thought. Strangely enough, the neighbors, who had all become charitably or inquisitively interested in Jim's illness, regarding his recovery or death equally as a Heaven-sent sensation, paid very little attention to Mary's arrival or departure in comparison to the sentiment which her mother aroused. I am sure the livery-stable man would not have loaned his carriage for Miss Sharpless. A child next door named Mrs. Sharpless "the lady that makes the pretty little walkings," by which it meant her small foot-prints through the slush and mud, and used to get in her way, and hold to her skirts, unrebuked, with sticky little paws, and howl dismally when she passed out of sight. The youngster never did aught but stare and pout at Mary, whose "walkings" were even smaller and prettier than her mother's; the other children made faces and ran away, rather to the young lady's relief, I dare say. "They're so horribly dirty, poor little things!" she explained to Nathan, drawing her delicate petticoats aside. Mrs. Slaney sniffed lamentably the whole day Mrs. Sharpless left, and the laundress across the street and the charwoman who lived in two rooms over the laundress came and drank tea and sniffed with her. They used to run after Nat and stop him on the street to ask after Jim's mother. Nobody ever inquired about Mary. "It's because she's young and pretty — the women can forgive each other anything but that," Burke said to himself, a trifle bitterly, reviewing his recent experience with the sex.

The fact that he himself could seldom see Mary now, and that other men enjoyed that privilege — being no more worthy, by heavens, than Nat Burke! — and might be taking advantage of it to make all kinds of love to her, occasionally produced in the young gentleman moods of terrific cynicism and melancholy, when he was dark, gloomy, and sarcastic to a degree that filled his fellow-clerks and students with wonder and suspicion. Fortunately he had too much to do and was too heartily interested in his work to be dreaming of his lady-love all the time, — no sane, healthy man ever did that, no, nor even a fifth nor a tenth part of his time, for that matter. And Burke had the weakest possible foundation for dreams anyhow. He had never held Mary's hand a second longer or with a shade closer pressure than civility regulates nor uttered a word other than the most diluted generalities on the subject nearest his heart. He could not help looking at her, watching her — was she aware of it? The glance of her gray eyes under those bewildering long black lashes brought the blood to the young fellow's face, set his heart thumping like a trip-hammer — did Mary know that? The faint shell-pink in her cheeks never changed; unquestionably *her* heart beat no faster than any well-behaved girl's should. Her slim hands never faltered on the piano-keys — and there was that donkey of a Nathan clumsily turning the music for her — all in the wrong places, no doubt, which she bore with an angelic patience — in such a fluster as he bent over her neatly woven black braids that he could scarcely breathe! She sang for him in her sweet, fluty voice, with all sorts of quavers and grace-notes, those self-same insipid, sentimental, mawkish ditties which Nat had heard performed by various belles in Mrs. Ducey's parlor — which he had heard and abhorred. There he sat, the simpleton, and listened entranced. Did Mary know that she had fascinated him, and did she encourage him? Who am I that I should fathom these mysteries? And if she had, would it have been any great harm?

But these delightful times were all over and done with now, since the ladies had no longer any occasion to visit Jim, and the Reverend Mr. Sharpless's embargo was revived and active. The flinty old man persevered in his self-appointed way; there was something inconceivably childish, incon-

ceivably deliberate and mature about it. He passed his son in the street, looking him full in the face — for he would stoop to no tricks, and scorned to make pretences — without sign of recognition. "How do you do, Mr. Burke?" he said in his rotund, oratorical voice, and went on, erect and stern. Jim looked after him, both distress and amusement in his expression. "He suffers for that, Nathan," he said as they walked away; "and am I helped by it? Not at all. Father is trying to be consistent, at any rate; he's doing now what he'll have to do through all eternity, according to his creed. The blessed can't take any notice of the damned, can they? It would be uncomfortable and dispiriting and likely to get on one's nerves to see an acquaintance toasting over a brisk fire, stimulated by a handy imp or two, I should think. The contradiction is that father expects to be happy eternally doing the very thing that makes him unhappy here! Have you seen my mother or Mary lately?"

"Why, no — I — I don't go there, you know," said Nat, a little confused. The truth was he had taken it for granted that he was outside the pale with Jim himself; and gone back uncomplainingly to his previous devices of lingering about in the back of church, altering his course to pass the Sharpless home, and keeping a watch for Mary on the street. He always got a smile and nod from her now; quite often she would stop and speak to him. The conversation was invariably directed upon Jim or her mother, or the weather, or something equally impersonal, to be sure — but upon Mary's lips the simple statement that two and two make four would have possessed an indefinable charm for Burke.

"Why not?" Jim asked him. "I wish you would sometimes — just to keep me in closer touch with them. John Vardaman goes once in a while; but of course he's pretty busy with his practice, and then John doesn't seem to care much about going to see girls any more. I don't know whether he'll ever get over that other business — mother told you, didn't she? Jack's a good fellow — I wish he *would* marry Mary," said Jim, in a tone that moved Burke to ask in a painstakingly firm and clear voice if there had been any talk of such a match?

"Yes,— a little. Not in the family, you know. Neither one of 'em has ever said anything, and I'm sure John's never

asked her — but people will talk around — one can't help hearing gossip. I'd be glad of it — not because John has independent means, you know —"

"As if I thought that!"

"Well, Nat, it's not such a bad thing, as the world goes," said Jim, surprised at the other's vehemence; "somehow I think Mary would be likely to fall in love with some fellow that had money. Mary's got her feelings pretty well under control. She's not mercenary, of course, — but why, a man with money generally has the best of it with girls. But Jack Vardaman has a hundred good qualities to recommend him, even if he hadn't a cent."

"Yes, he has!" said poor Nat, miserably. What chance would he have with a man like Vardaman in the race? *He*, at least, would be a fit husband for her, Burke thought with a sigh, a fine and kindly man, an educated, travelled, talented gentleman. There was a vast difference between the doctor and that good-looking popinjay of an Andrews who, anyhow, was married right and tight and safely out of the way. Mary had not wanted him with all his money, or expectations, Nat said to himself with a glow of tender pride in this vindication of her disinterestedness. Evidently Jim did not understand, never would understand her, for all his cleverness and his swift sympathy. Nathan tried to think of Vardaman without jealousy; what more ought he to ask than that Mary should be happy?

Burke was somewhat surprised to discover that ex-Governor Gwynne's practice, which he had supposed was concerned only with large transactions and weighty people, embraced, on the contrary, all sorts and conditions of men, and every variety of legal business. No fish seemed to be too small for that net which Gwynne was eternally spreading: democracy — equality — simplicity — were his slogan; I have seen him borrow a chew of tobacco (which he loathed) of an humble constituent; he would have worn hob-nail boots and gone without his collar had that been agreeable to his ideas of personal dignity and cleanliness. To Burke there was something painful in this weakness of a strong man; in every other act of his life the governor displayed a good mind, a high character, unimpeachable honesty; but ambition,

which makes some men heroes, made him only feeble and sometimes a little ridiculous. In the office every one took a hand at bolstering up this fictitious republicanism; the man who wanted to replevin a drove of hogs was laboriously made to feel as important and necessary as any member of those deputations of capitalists who desired to take the legal steps for incorporating this, bonding that, entering suit against the other. These latter dignitaries, it is true, were always ushered at once into the rear office, a handsomely appointed room where the eminent counsel sat in elegant retirement, very different from the free-and-easy quarters of old George Marsh farther down the street. Whereas the wronged proprietor of the hogs had to be content with the outer office and the advice of Mr. Gilbert Gwynne — who, however, always laid the case before his uncle (so he said) and secured the governor's carefully weighed opinion before taking any kind of action. Gilbert was a conscientious henchman. Once in a while the Honorable Samuel Gwynne himself came forth and shook hands with the farmers and drovers and inquired after their wives and families and everybody in their neighborhood to the third and fourth generation. These outer precincts were themselves well supplied in a solid plain style with desks and arm-chairs and glazed book-cases along the walls. Archer Lewis,[1] who was a sprightly young man, about Burke's own age, of a quick, bright mind and most genial temper, prosecuted his studies with a fair amount of zeal at one of the desks; and Steven Gwynne, a cousin or distant relative of the governor's, sometimes occupied the other. He was a talkative, erratic sort of fellow, good-looking, and rather dull in an extraordinary fashion, not without humor and some kindliness, and a good deal of harmless conceit. The young men, who already knew Burke, welcomed him heartily; Gilbert Gywnne examined him and directed his studies — under the governor's explicit advice, as he did not fail to tell Nathan, who reported some of these proceedings, grinning, to his intimates. Dr. Vardaman used to hail him on the street, and inquire with a severe face how far he had progressed in the "ingenuous arts" and whether Governor Gwynne had

[1] Still living (1884) and my very good friend. — N. B.

succeeded in "mollifying his manners" yet. "You can supply the rest of the quotation, of course," says Jack, pompously. And Nat, thinking of the farmers and drovers with their rough boots and their red worsted comforters and their big red knuckles and their plug-tobacco, had to laugh. Indeed, these plain clients of the governor's rather affected Mr. Burke's company; they liked him, albeit *he* never chewed with them, nor asked after the wives and babies; many of them remembered him from the old days, or from his association with Mr. Marsh. When they happened upon him at odd times and seasons in the Gwynne office, they opened their troubles with an amazing freedom and confidence; he could argue them into a better frame of mind and an amicable settlement with a facility, patience, and good-temper which attracted Gilbert Gwynne's favorable notice, although, Heaven knows, it was no great feat nor was Nat particularly gifted. He possessed the chance-bestowed advantage of being one of these people by birth and inheritance, and of thoroughly understanding their point of view; he could meet them on their own ground and speak their shibboleth. He knew in intimate detail the whole of their hard, simple lives, having so lived himself; all their desires, standards, prejudices, loves, and hates he knew, fashioned his discourse accordingly, and touched with them at a hundred unconsidered points. Often they had that common remembrance which is one of the most enduring of ties. "Ain't you John Burke's son?" one middle-aged backwoodsman asked him; and for a moment this plaintiff — he had some grievance about a culvert and a right-of-way — forgot his cause, and they talked of the Scioto and the Olentanjy, and the old Smoky-Row Road where he lived, and of John Burke and Jake Darnell whom he had known, and of the young mother whom Nathan himself could not remember. "Ye favor yer pap some," said the other; "but I guess yeh take after yer maw's fambly most. Yer maw she had real light hair — she was a Granger. Her folks come from Canady, I've heern tell. I reckon they was Refugees, wa'n't they? They useter tell how th' Gov'ment give a place fer ter live — a right smart bit of land — to every Britisher that moved in here from Canady, er 'crost th' lakes endurin' th' war times. 'Twas a kinder indoocement, yeh might say, en a

whole pilin' lot of 'em come. That was why they called 'em Refugees, 'n' they called th' land th' Refugee Track. Leastways I rec'lect 'em tellin' 'bout it when I was a boy. 'Pears like th' Track was located round here somewheres. How was that, anyhow?" On being told that the city was built upon part of this historic ground — "I swanny, yeh don't say!" he ejaculated in a sort of meditative surprise; "well, then, it was true after all. I alluz kinder jedged it might be one of these stories folks like to tell. Yeh ain't ben out ter th' country much recent, hev ye? Not in ten years, somebody was tellin' me. 'Course, not havin' any kin there, yeh wouldn't be likely to." Burke, coloring, and a little ashamed, had to admit it — but it wasn't quite so long, between six and seven years, that was all — and of course he meant to ride out to the Williamses and look everybody up sometime soon, oh, very soon — next summer, he guessed. And then Governor Gwynne, having doubtless been notified by the vigilant Gilbert, came out and greeted his client warmly, and said some very kind and agreeable things about Burke that made the young man redden again for pure pleasure — for, conceited or not, I believe for once the governor meant them.

"Who *were* your people anyway, Burke?" young Lewis asked him afterwards, not at all inquisitively, but with a genuine interest. "Don't you know anything about 'em? I was looking up a title the other day — it was a piece of property where the tannery is, you know, that James Hunt & Sons bought of Mr. Marsh — and it went back to a man named Granger. By George, his name was Nathan, too, I remember! Was he a relative?"

"Might have been — you can't prove it by me," said Nat, who, perhaps, had had sundry similar experiences in the course of his legal labors; "Granger's not an uncommon name, nor Burke either, for that matter. I've never bothered much about my family —" and seeing the other look at him a little curiously, he added, half-apologetic and half-defiant: "I'm not saying I don't care, you know. But I — well, I don't take the time to think about it. I'm too busy."

"You're a self-made man, that's what you are, Nat," said his friend, soberly.

There came a day at last, when, without any beating of

cymbals or braying of trumpets, mighty as the event seemed in his own eyes, Mr. Burke was admitted into that great and noble Temple of Jurisprudence (as he had heard Governor Gwynne call it) in the outer porticos whereof he had so long been laboring; and stood for the third and final time in his life upon the threshold of a career. The United States Court on circuit was in its spring session, and the court (Judge Swan) appointed Mr. Mease Smith and Mr. Burroughs, whose names will be well remembered by the bar of this State, to examine the candidate. Burke went with these gentlemen (who were chatting together in a very light-minded and unconcerned style, considering the solemnity of the occasion) into a little room opening off the marshal's office to the right of the door as you entered the old Court-house, which was still in use at this time. And having managed to answer their questions in a tolerably clear-headed and concise manner, the clerk was called in and according to the informal fashion of that day, then and there, during March term, A.D. 184–, of the Supreme Court of the State of Ohio, Nathan Burke, Esq., was certified and licensed to practise as Attorney and Counsellor at Law and Solicitor in Chancery in the Several Courts of this State — "and may the Lord have mercy on your soul!" said one of his judges, in a hollow voice, observing, it may be, the gravity of the young fellow's expression; and both gentlemen laughed aloud and shook his hand and wished him success.

Nat went out and stood at the top of the Court-house steps; it was a bright and blowing day, and the face of Nature being nowise changed, notwithstanding the recent event, he took for a good omen this cheerful sky. Judge Burke — Attorney-general Burke — Chief-justice Burke — what heights did he not scale in that triumphant moment! As he stood, Jim Sharpless and Vardaman came walking together from the direction of the doctor's office, and, glancing up, halted, struck, no doubt, by something in Burke's air, for they had known he was going to present himself for admittance shortly.

"What, Nathan! Hail, Nathan!" said the doctor, waving his cane; but Jim, who possessed a quick almost womanish intuition in these matters, ran up the steps and seized his friend's hands. "Is it all over, Nat? Is it over?

Have you passed?" he cried out. Nat told him, pleased, proud, touched. There was another great time of shaking hands, and Vardaman fell into a burlesque attitude and shouted out, "*Hic labor extremis, hic meta longarum viarum!*" in a tremendous bellow to the astonishment of the passers-by. *Longarum viarum* indeed! Nobody but Burke knew how long had been that way.

During these congratulations there emerged from the doors of the Erin-go-Bragh across the way, lo, that very same stout, short, and jocund gentleman upon whose hint Burke had begun his studies some three or four years ago; and whom, in fact, the young man had seen many times since at lawyers' offices or at the Court-house, where he might be arguing a case with a great deal of vigor, acuteness, and power of persuasion. He now came across the street, eying them gravely, so that Burke gave him a sort of tentative salute. Upon that the other stopped short. "You have the advantage of me, sir," he said very pleasantly; "yet your face is perfectly familiar. I suppose we have met?"

They had met, and Burke reminded him how and when — judiciously leaving out some details — in a slight confusion, adding that he had acted on the other's advice.

"What!" ejaculated the lawyer, and smiled. "I builded better than I knew. You've just been admitted, hey? What? Now? This moment?" He walked up to Nat and prodded him on the chest with a rigid forefinger. "Ahem! Mr. Burke," said he, profoundly, "what *is* Law?"

"Well, I'll be damned if I know!" said the young fellow, happy and reckless. "Will you come and have a drink, sir?"

"Young man, I never drink!" said the other, majestically; and walked off with a mighty flourish, laughing his loud, jolly laugh.

CHAPTER XX

Contains Some Business and a Good Deal of Pleasure

The right to put "esquire" after his name, which he had striven so earnestly to acquire — although, indeed, he might have adorned himself with that title at any time without attracting much notice — was, I am pained to state, almost all that Mr. Burke got out of his late elevation for some three or four months thereafter. He rented a little room up one pair of stairs over a shoemaker's shop in a two-story frame building on Gay Street just off of High; installed a deal table, a couple of chairs, and a case of shelves which he knocked together with his own trusty right arm and hand and hammer out of an old packing-box got from the store; hired a sign-painter to do him a foot-square board with his name and profession tidily exhibited thereon, and affixed it to the wall at the bottom of the stairs; and, finally, inserted a card in the paper (it was the universal custom in my youth), informing the public that Nathan Burke, Att'y-at-Law and Notary Public, had opened an office in the above described locality, estates settled, collections promptly attended to, referred by permission to the Hon'ble Samuel Gwynne, George Marsh, Esq., etc. And having taken all these important steps, there the young gentleman sat in uninterrupted leisure for the space of time I have mentioned, improving his shining hours by a close review of what books he had or could borrow, and wondering intermittently if an era of world-wide peace had set in, to the extinction of all legal industry. Fortunately he had always been a thrifty youth, accustomed to a sparing way of life, so that he was tolerably well fortified against this lean period; and being of a confident and soberly cheerful temper, had no fears for the future. "Oh; yes, I've got to live pretty close," he said in answer to a question from his ancient friend and employer, Mr. Marsh; "but that's not worrying me any. If I can't

make out at the law, I can always get a job chopping wood, I guess."

He had parted from the old man on the best of terms, and with hearty good wishes on both sides. Mr. Marsh never held out any inducements for Burke to remain, or expressed any particular liking for him, or satisfaction with his work, or, to sum up, treated him otherwise than with an impartial respect and justice; for all that, he took in his way an interest in Burke's fortunes, showing it toward the close of their association in a dozen rough yet kindly speeches and acts. He never saw the young fellow on the street without stopping to ask how he was getting on, his old eyes twinkling a little, in response, perhaps, to some expression on Nat's own face — for they had grown to know each other very well — as the latter gravely informed him that he was not busy at the moment. The boys at the store, when they came around to see the new attorney — which they did quite often in the beginning, out of mingled curiosity and friendliness — reported that Mr. Marsh was actually almost enthusiastic in recommending Burke to the customers who might be needing a lawyer's services. They missed Nathan a good deal, they said — was he making as much at law as he had at bookkeeping for Marsh? "Not yet," Nat told them with a grin. Kellar had Nat's place now — the king is dead, long live the king! — so funny, they all kept calling Kellar, "Nat," just out of habit, you know. Mr. Ducey had won five hundred dollars in the Alexandria Lottery — had Burke heard? And they wouldn't wonder if Mr. Marsh was going to draw out of the business before long and leave it all to Ducey, sure enough. "You don't say so!" ejaculated Nathan, in astonishment; "oh, that must be a mistake. Why the place can't go on — that is, you can't imagine its going on without Marsh!"

"Well, that's what I've been hearing steady — don't know how true it is," said his informant; "of course you can't tell anything from the way old George acts himself. He's awfully close-mouthed when he wants to be. But he's getting pretty old, Nat. Every day of seventy-five I guess. I notice he ain't near as spry this last year; he kind of drags his feet a little when he walks; sometimes he don't get down to the store till way late in the morning. He's beginning

to break up, I wouldn't wonder; people notice it, you know."

"*I* haven't noticed it," said Burke, stoutly. He disliked to think of the sturdy old man in decay; Marsh had been Nat's first patron; it would have been difficult to define the sentiment the young man felt for him. And it was, besides, impossible to figure this ancient hero of a hundred hard-fought commercial battles in retirement. What would he do with himself, Burke mused. How would he put in the long day? I don't believe George Marsh ever read a book in his life, or played a game, or went to see a friend except on some business errand. Would he smoke a pipe in the chimney-corner, and wander out for a walk once in a while, and grow querulous and complaining about draughts and meals and medicine, and presently rust away like an old disused weapon — Nathan hastily averted his mind.

In spite of the reports, however, there seemed to be no present danger of all this happening. Old George appeared at his place of business every day as heretofore; and it was he who sent Nathan his first client. This case — which, alas, Mr. Burke lost! — was that of a market-gardener who had shipped twenty-one barrels of apples to somewhere by the canal; and they had all got frozen and spoiled, owing, the farmer thought, and his lawyer contended, to inadequate provision for their shelter on the road. Jim Sharpless used to represent, with impressive gestures and a deep rolling voice, the dramatic scene in the court-room when counsel for the plaintiff arose to make his plea — "This gifted young man's touching description of the sufferings of the unfortunate apples, shivering and huddled together beneath the wretched shanty into which an inhuman warehouse-keeper had thrust them in the dead of winter without fire or light, moved the hardest heart to pity and sympathy. And when he reached his peroration, which for grace of style, originality of thought, and fervid eloquence surpasses none ever before heard at our bar, there was not one eye open in the court-room!"

The unlucky outcome, however, occasioned poor Jim, who was very generous, affectionate, and enthusiastic about his friend, much deeper chagrin than was felt by counsel for the plaintiff himself. "Why, I thought you were going to win, Nat; I was dead certain you were going to win, or I

never would have made fun that way — you don't mind, do you, old fellow?" he said earnestly; "damn it, you ought to have won. I never saw such a set of dunderheaded fools as that jury!"

"Why, they were very respectable men and ordinarily intelligent, I thought," said Burke, philosophically; "I'm not expecting to win every time. You've got to take the bad with the good, and it evens up in the end, I guess." And in support of this theory it must be noted that, although worsted in his suit, Mr. Burke was, on the whole, favorably received in the court-room, and made so good an impression that some one shortly after sought him out and retained him for a case involving a lease and subrental, which Burke gained this time. One or two of Governor Gwynne's carefully cultivated rustic or backwoods patrons discovered him; he got a payment of an order for groceries — from a man who had a suit against the city for a broken leg — which would have kept him, as he was of rather frugal and temperate disposition, for the rest of his natural life; and got it discounted, so to speak, by his landlord, the shoemaker, who happened to have some spare cash. "I'm beginning the traditional way," said Burke, retailing this financial transaction to his friends; "I heard Governor Gwynne telling somebody once that his first fee was three bushels of potatoes."

"Ho, they used to get that sort of stuff in payment for subscriptions at the *Journal* office all the time," said Jim; "bags of corn-meal and duck and quail and deer in season, hams and shoulders — tallow candles — everything you can think of, even patchwork counterpanes. People don't do that way so much nowadays, though. The journalistic profession," said Jim, pompously, "is looking up since our well-born, well-educated, and talented youth have begun to enter it. Although we cannot but deplore Mr. S—'s opinions, we must at least allow him, etc. etc." He laughed as he turned to his writing; he had quoted the last words from a review which had appeared in the *Gazette* not long before.

There had been, in fact, an extraordinary reversal of public opinion regarding Jim the last year or so. Nothing succeeds like success; and the young fellow's readiness of pen, his satirical and humorous insight, his quick, comprehensive vision of men and affairs, had lately begun to make him a

figure of some prominence in our small literary world. We took these things with very great seriousness in those days. During the legislative sessions Sharpless was correspondent for half-a-dozen papers elsewhere in the State; he had got three articles accepted by the *American Review*, "a Whig Journal devoted to Politics and Literature," which was published monthly in New York with a steel-engraving of some celebrity for a frontispiece; you may see any number of J. S.'s contributions within the pages of that long dead and forgotten magazine during the decade of '40–'50. Jim's essays were on literary subjects, and one, at least, of his readers thought them by far the most pointed, scholarly, and withal humane that the *American Review* ever published. And that winter there was brought out (by Messrs. Leavitt, Throw & Co., of 33 Ann Street, New York, great purveyors of gift-books, annuals, and so on, in those simple old days) a little volume of "Translations from Béranger, by J. S.," charmingly gotten up with a white cover embossed with blue and pink and silver wreaths, ribbons, scrolls, flambeaux, and what-not in the most refined and fashionable taste; it had its steel-engraving, too, of "Flora" or "Julia" or "Zuleika" or some such romantic, simpering female facing the title-page — she had nothing whatever to do with Béranger; but what of that? No book of this nature would have been complete without her, with her grin and her languishing eyes, and her alarmingly low-cut bodice. The book-sellers assured one that this concoction was "just the thing for a gift to a young lady, or for the parlor-table." One of these astute gentlemen advertised it in a review as by *our gifted fellow-townsman!* It sold like sixty, like hot cakes, like wildfire! People who had never read a line of poetry in their lives, nor heard of Béranger, nor understood a word of the French language, so that they were wholly incapable of appreciating the incomparable deftness of Jim's English, bought it by the dozens. In a short while Mr. James Sharpless, very much to his own amusement, found himself suddenly rehabilitated both in pocket and in the estimate of society. Who shall expound these mysteries? Jim, who up till now had been a reprehensible vagabond, foraging in discreditable places, discoursing unmentionable heresies, knowing impossible people, living anyhow and everyhow,

shunned by all respectability like the plague — Jim was now become, without altering a single one of his habits or opinions, an erratic, brilliant, companionable fellow, a dreadful Bohemian, but so original and so talented! Female society smiled on him! He was admitted in the wake of his little gilt book to the front-parlors of the elect. He had to buy a white waistcoat and make other additions to his Robert-Macaire wardrobe. The young ladies who owned "Translations from Béranger by J. S." used to ask him prettily to write his name in their copies; they received him in quite a flutter and paraded Mr. Sharpless, the author, before strangers and visitors; and were perfectly sure that he was a wild, cynical, irreligious and — ahem! — yes, let us say it — immoral person whom it was dangerous and therefore highly desirable to know.

"I'm quite devilish and popular," Jim would say with his kind satire; "girls I've known all my life and used to play with when we were children have all at once discovered that I still exist — after having cut me dead for years, under their mothers' orders, I suppose. But all the mothers remember me now. It's the women that do it, after all, Nat. *Men* know, *you* know, Jack Vardaman knows, that I'm just as I've always been. A little success that, by heavens, I've worked hard for and deserved, doesn't make any different or better man of me. I still stick to my monstrous beliefs, and if I don't thrust them down people's throats, why, I never have. I humbly trust that, creedless as I am, I live decently and cleanly and like a man. But the women can't believe that, and upon my soul, they don't want to believe it! You'll never be a social success, Nat; you've got such a damning reputation for steadiness and respectability. If you'd only contrive to spread abroad a rumor of your terrible immoralities and seductions, you'd have a whole army of 'em after you to reform you."

"I shouldn't want a whole army — one would do me," Burke said with a laugh. "Your mother is very proud of you, Jim; she goes around with the dearest little I-told-you-so air. Does your father ever —?"

"No, not a word," said Jim. He looked at his friend with a kind of regretful pride in his face. "The old man is always consistent, or tries to be, and what's more, he's *right* this

time, Nathan. If I were President Sharpless in the White House and still believed as I do, Jonathan Edwards Sharpless would still refuse to speak to me, or allow me under his roof. He'd think he'd betrayed his Master, if he countenanced me. I tell you, Nat, I'm proud of him. Who was that fellow that said every man has his price? If he could have known my father, he'd have changed his mind, I think."

If he could have known the son, he would have changed his mind, Burke thought. Prosperity is so much harder a test than adversity that, if Jim's head had been ever so little turned by all the notice and flattery he got, it would not have been at all surprising. But he remained unspoiled by the one as by the other, gay, chivalrous, and kind, pleased with the sunshine as he had been indifferent to the rain. Vardaman could have had Jim to live with him in absolute safety now. "Most remarkable thing, I believe he'd increase my practice!" Jack observed with a false air of simplicity. He invited us to dine with him at his house which was presided over by his only sister, a lady some few years older than the doctor, and looking exactly like him in petticoats. It was a type, which, however passable in a man, was not suited to the accepted ideas of feminine attractiveness. Miss Clara Vardaman, whom I know to have been a most sweet and lovable woman, was never known to have received a moment's attention from any male human being. She was rather tall, thin, and flat, always exquisitely neat, with a gold watch and chain around her neck, a cluster of curls in front of her ears on either cheek, very beautiful small hands and feet, of which she was harmlessly vain, I think, and a manner of chilling reserve, due, I have since felt convinced, to extreme and painful shyness. I have heard my wife say that if ever the Lord cut out and fashioned a woman to be an old maid, it was Clara Vardaman. As young as she was at this time — not more than thirty-four or thirty-five — she already owned a parrot and a poodle! She was one of the most immaculate housekeepers that ever stepped in shoe-leather; she was past mistress of the womanly arts of cooking and sewing; she worshipped the doctor as a superior being, measured all other men up to him, and if anyone mentioned So-and-So as being a good husband or a

promising young man, never failed to remark with surprise: "Why, he's not *at all* like Jack!" Under her anxious supervision the dinner to which Dr. Vardaman invited that rising young member of the bar, Mr. Nathan Burke, and that eminent man of letters, Mr. James Sharpless, in company with a few other intimate friends, was conducted with a magnificence of things to eat and things to drink and rich old plate and china, the like of which Mr. Burke, who had recently been making his first ventures in society, had never beheld before. I dare say Miss Vardaman had been busy for days with the boned turkey, the chicken salad, the custards and jellies, and the dozen or so other sweets and relishes which crowded the table. She sat at its head behind the great old silver coffee-urn, quite silent in her green silk dress, with her point-lace collar, with the handsome garnet necklace that had come to her from her mother, and the odd old crown-set diamonds on her delicate fingers, thankfully watching everybody eat, and frowning dreadfully when the servant dropped a fork, and nervously smiling at her brother's jokes, which she could not understand, but which she was loyally certain must be very funny. She did not laugh at Jim's, which equally she did not understand — but she had a secret dread that they might be evil-minded.

"You are *the* Mr. Burke that Judge Swan was talking about the other day, aren't you?" she said timidly to her right-hand neighbor; "he said you handled the — the case, a case about something, I — I don't quite remember what, Mr. Burke — but he said you handled it so well."

"Judge Swan has always been very kind to me," said the gentleman.

"Do you play chess, Mr. Burke? No? Why, how odd! I thought you were so clever. Jack plays chess."

And this was the extent of the conversation. Perhaps Mr. Burke himself did not make much of an effort to sustain it; he had just caught a glance from Miss Mary Sharpless's large and lovely gray eyes (across the pyramidal, sparkling, cut-glass-and-silver castor in the middle of the table) that had started a suffocating commotion under his white shirt-front and crisp satin neck-scarf.

"I think it's perfectly wonderful your being able to speak French, Mr. Sharpless," said Miss Clara. "Jack speaks

French — he's been there, you know. But Jack can do everything. French is very hard — all those awful verbs. It takes a very bright person, I'm sure. I don't see how you ever learned."

"Why, I learned of a drunken old fiddler named Jean-Baptiste Leroux, that said he had been a soldier in Napoleon's army, and had dreadful tales of Jena and Waterloo," Jim told her. "He used to come around to the coffee-houses and play for pennies, and I got to know him quite well." Miss Vardaman colored, and began hastily to talk about the weather, in evident fear lest Jim might embark upon some indiscreet details — Frenchmen, coffee-houses — Mercy! It was Burke's privilege to take Miss Sharpless home that evening — and Jim, with a truly fraternal inability to perceive that two were company and three none, walked with them all the way!

It will be seen that Mr. Nat had now, by imperceptible degrees and entirely unknown to himself, entered what Mr. Jeames de la Pluche (writing in an English magazine, I think, at about this time) styled the "hupper sukkles." The young man who was studying law — in however informal a fashion — in Governor Gwynne's office had a certain social advantage over Mr. Marsh's head-bookkeeper; and imagination staggers at contemplating the gulf that separated that same young man, admitted to the bar, and moderately successful, from Mr. Ducey's chore-boy! It was not ten years yet, but nobody remembered that creditable yet not at all picturesque passage in Burke's career. This subtle alteration, when it was finally forced upon Nat's notice, moved him, as Sharpless was moved in circumstances not altogether dissimilar, to hearty mirth. Like Jim, he was conscious of no change in himself, unless it might be the change incident to advancing years and experience; failings and ambitions, good and evil, weak and strong, the man Nathan Burke was the boy Nathan Burke. What or who was accountable for the new atmosphere in which he moved? Why, again, in one word, the ladies! "It's the women that do it, after all," Jim had said of his own case. Boy and man, Nathan had never lacked friends and society among his own sex, nor been made aware of any barrier of

caste; it is the wives and mothers who adjust the scale, who judge, decide, govern, and protect in all social matters. Their office seems to be somewhere between guardian angel and private detective; they tell us whom we shall bow to on the street, and whom we may invite to dinner; we dress, dance, make calls, go to the theatre, frequent church-fairs and card-parties, marry and give in marriage by their formula — it is conceivable that men, left to themselves, would never perform any of these duties at all! One cannot suppose that all the matrons of our society assembled in caucus, and took a rising vote as to Mr. Burke's eligibility to their own and their daughters' acquaintance; there would be a sort of crude male directness about such a proceeding. No, the thing must have been accomplished by some potent agency of which man knows nothing, working in secret. Of a sudden Nat discovered that he was taking off his hat a great many more times upon his daily walks abroad than he ever had before; that Miss Sharpless was not the sole young lady who stopped and chatted with him about the weather; that it might be desirable to own an evening-coat and pumps; and, for a concluding touch, Miss Frances Blake, who had been away a whole year in New York City at Madame Chegaray's fashionable boarding-school, and returned altogether grown up and dressed up, called him "Mr. Burke" with a bright blush over her fresh little face — which was still rather round and infantine, notwithstanding her seventeen years — and gave him her hand in a very formal style when they met. He told Jim Sharpless about it with a laugh.

"She was with Mrs. Ducey and George in the carriage. Francie, all over ribbons with a straw bonnet full of flowers, like a dear little wren dressed out in bird o' Paradise plumes. She looks prettier in plain clothes, I think, but probably her aunt won't have her any other way. Mrs. Ducey herself was very brilliant, ten times the handsomer woman of the two even at her age, with something very sweet, proud, and maternal in the way she tried to put Francie forward and keep herself in the background. They've always treated Francie just like their own child, you know. But Jim, you ought to have seen George Ducey — he went on to New York with his mother, you know, when they brought Francie

back — the most tremendous swell in one of those new plaid velvet waistcoats, the very latest cut, and his boots varnished with that patent blacking-stuff they use now, so you could see your face in 'em, 'through a glass darkly' like a rosewood piano-case. And lemon-colored kid gloves so tight he had to hold his fingers spread out — he couldn't have shaken hands with me even if he'd wanted to. They saw me coming out of Gwynne's office — otherwise I don't know whether George could have been prevailed upon to recognize me," said Nat, laughing; "only he'd probably mind his mother."

"Yes, and there aren't any affectations about Mrs. Ducey," Jim said; "she's a fine woman. If you were a chimney-sweep, she'd stop and speak to you before all the world, if she liked you — yes, and ask you to her house and give you the best room in it in defiance of what people might say. I believe she's always rather championed *me*. I know she used to make a point of being kind to me. It seems incredible that she should be the mother of that infernal puppy George."

Dr. Vardaman, sitting by, smoking one of the segars to which he insisted on treating us — of the very best variety, for Jack had certain fastidious tastes and spent a good deal of money that way — looked up quizzically.

"Why, Jim," he said, "I see a kind of crooked likeness between them. You might define it by saying that Mrs. Ducey's worst qualities are George's best!"

"There's a good strong dash of Ducey, too, I think," growled Jim; "or of that other fellow — what did you say his name was, Nat? Old Marsh's brother that he told you about. I mean the one that pretended to be a disinherited earl, and got through all the money he could lay hands on — George's grandfather, wasn't he? I notice a kind of family likeness there, don't you? Lord, what a jackass the creature is!" said Jim, with singular fury; "the idea of that nice, sweet, sensible, little Fran — Miss Blake being obliged to go around with *him!*"

"She won't be obliged to for long," Vardaman said with a laugh; "calm yourself. Miss Blake is pretty well liked by the men, I understand."

"Oh" said Sharpless, a little blankly; and he sat silent for a while, puffing furious clouds of smoke.

"How are your medical studies progressing, John?"

Nathan asked at last; and all three young men burst out laughing. This simple question had been a by-word with them for the last two years or so. It gave them an idiotic pleasure to support the fiction of the doctor being George Ducey's pupil; they laid bets as to how much longer George would continue in the medical profession, and which he would take up next: law, arms, or divinity? Vardaman displayed a patience with him which might have confirmed us in our belief — had we needed to be confirmed — in Jack's unfailing generosity of spirit and kind heart. In six months George was directing the doctor how to run his office, cure his patients, collect his bills, invest his money. And before long we heard that he was ripe for practice, but Jack Vardaman's envy and jealousy held him back!" "Oh, that's nothing, that sort of talk," said the doctor to us in private, after some amiable person had brought him this report; "it's what George may *do* that I'm afraid of. Supposing somebody let him undertake a case of pneumonia or typhus! I tell you, fellows, the very devil's in it — he's a menace to the community!" But Burke thought the hard, often unpaid, and thankless duties of a physician would not be enough to George's liking for the doctor to dread that risk. "Fancy George hopping out of bed in the middle of a freezing winter night to go to a case of small-pox!" he said; "or leaving his nice hot dinner to dose somebody's baby for the croup. It's unimaginable."

It was so natural for a man of Jim Sharpless's character to dislike George Ducey that I am sure it never occurred to either of his friends that there might be some other feeling equally strong underlying his dislike. Burke was pretty well occupied with his own affairs, business and sentiment both, at this time; and, as months went on, and in spite of persistent rumors, Mary and the doctor never seemed to get any farther than a comfortable friendship, Nat's hopes revived. Probably they had never suffered any serious setback, for love being on the whole a selfish growth, it is difficult to kill out, except by some such withering frost as marriage with somebody else — which was what Jack Vardaman had had to endure. And, at any rate, even the most diffident and self-distrustful of men — which Burke was not — could hardly have interpreted otherwise than as encouragement

the gentle words and glances he got from Miss Sharpless. She was so sweet, so sympathetic, so deeply interested in his work and plans, so unaffectedly glad to see him, so mindful of his tastes, even to the point of wearing frocks he had admired and playing his favorite selection on the pianoforte, which was a good, loud, thundering piece entitled "The Battle of Prague," that made the windows rattle and sent agreeable tremors up and down the spine — I do not see what he could have gathered from all this unless encouragement. Once she called him "Nathan," by accident, of course, and apologized for it in a confusion that melted him into an alarming state of tenderness. "I always think of you that way — I — I can't help it, you know," said Mary — and then Mrs. Sharpless came in with her crocheting and unconsciously put a stop to the very interesting avowal Mr. Burke was about to make.

He was a little relieved to think he had been so headed off, as he walked back to Mrs. Slaney's that night. What business had he to ask any woman to marry him, or to wait for him until he had enough to marry on? It would be doing her a rank injustice if she accepted him — and giving her needless distress if she refused. Jack Vardaman now — but Jack hadn't the faintest idea of asking Mary or anybody else, Nat was confident; and had no qualms even when, calling at the house, he found the doctor seated cosily on the frail little shabby parlor-sofa which Mrs. Sharpless had patched up in a dozen places, listening to Lord knows what symphony, nocturne, berceuse, or other species of music in which Vardaman had a discriminating and cultivated taste. "Don't you want 'The Battle of Prague' now, Mr. Burke?" says Mary, the moment it is finished, directing her clear glance upon him almost with the effect of a caress. "Oh, yes, let's have 'The Battle of Prague,' by all means," says the doctor, heartily. And presently the sofa is quivering under them to the chords of that martial composition, and Mrs. Sharpless casting rather apprehensive glances in its direction. Both gentlemen applaud the finale to the echo, and Mary asks Mr. Burke what he will have next? For somehow it seems to Nat that she is always kindest and sweetest to him when Jack Vardaman is by!

CHAPTER XXI

In which Mr. Burke casts his First Vote

Whether the points at issue in the Presidential campaign of 1844 were more vital to the nation's health, or were more bitterly and vigorously contested, or whether the event acquired importance and dignity in his eyes from the operation recorded in the heading of this chapter, or from whatever cause, Burke has always retained a more vivid memory of that political struggle than of any other, even the much deadlier and more decisive ones that succeeded it. My friends, it's a fine thing to be young and cast your first vote. How much depends on that ballot! With what a fresh and honest patriotism and zealous belief is it slipped into the box! How eloquently, how earnestly, how solemnly were the young voters of the country who were about to perform this feat exhorted and addressed from the platform, the pulpit, the Court-house steps, the State-house yard, the street-corners, the editorial columns of the *Ohio Statesman* (Dem.), the *State Journal* (Whig), the dozen-and-one partisan sheets which used to spring up about the first of August and flourish until after the first Friday in November, when they all incontinently withered down like Jonah's gourd! I came upon one of them by accident the other day; maybe it had been guaranteeing some parcel against the moth in a corner of the garret; it was yellowed with time and dust; its old print, its clumsy old wood-cuts were yellowed — and Good Lord, what a lifeless thing it was with its vapid boasting, its lies, its toothless sarcasms, its insults that can't insult anybody any more, its jokes that will never again raise a laugh this side of Styx! Once it must have come off the presses damp, and been hawked about the streets, and eagerly bought and read and wrangled over — can you fancy it? I remember the man who edited it — I who speak to you — and he was

a good fellow in spite of the terrific blows he gave and took; now he and his paper and the men he assailed are one dust; and the principles they supported, and the war they waged, and the rest of their deeds, are they not all written in chronicles where anybody can read them and nobody does? Yet a little while, and you and I shall have joined them; and other battles shall go on over our heads, and other voters shall be shouted at and encouraged and blarneyed, and we shall rest well in our secure and comfortable oblivion.

Mr. Burke, who had little time to spare from the business of making his living, and had arrived at a hearty contempt for certain political methods and their exponents, and who, moreover, had made up his youthful mind early in the game and resolved to vote for Clay and Frelinghuysen when the Whig Convention in Baltimore announced those gentlemen as its choice of candidates, about the beginning of May, presently found himself somewhat in the position of the innocent bystander who is always getting into trouble during a riot. For all his obstinacy and indifference he could not escape the contagion of excitement. Were we more in earnest in those days, or was it only that we had less of public interest to occupy our minds? We looked to a change of administration as we might have to the millennium. During a Presidential campaign, every other kind of business came almost to an absolute stand; at this distance of time it seems to me we spent the days in mass-meetings and the nights in torch-light parades. The store windows were crowded with flags, portraits, "emblems." The Whigs were "Coons," the Democrats "Polk-stalks," "Polk-berries," "Polk —" never mind what! These elegant pages shall not be defaced with all the names we bestowed on one another.

Amongst Nat's acquaintance there was a pretty fair division between Clay men and Polk men, old Mr. Marsh belonging to the first party, Sharpless and Jack Vardaman to the last-named. Oddly enough, these younger men did not seem to take the political situation so seriously as old George, who, having seen certainly a half-score of campaigns, ought to have been, one would think, tolerably well seasoned to them by this time. But his interest was almost boyishly vehement; he stopped people on the street, he held forth in the Erin-go-Bragh; putting, as is frequently the case, a great

deal of energy into expounding and defending the doctrines of his party to men who, like Burke, believed as he did, and did not need to be argued over. Perhaps the old man wearied of his deferential audience at the store; he hardly took the pains to pretend an interest in Ducey's opinions. The clerks reported that he was daily growing more crabbed and exacting — "and grumpy — you never saw the beat of him!" one boy told Nathan; "he'll sit for hours without saying a word. He's asleep part of the time over his old paper, and always wakes up mad as a hornet and glares around to see if anybody's noticed him. There ain't so many people coming in to see him as there used to was, y'know, Nat. It's sort of dull in the store."

"Campaign year, you know," Burke suggested. But the other shook his head. "'Tain't that," he said wisely. "Marsh is getting pretty old, and, by jingo, there ain't anybody left *to* come in. They've been dying off lately — old So-and-So, you know, and Such-a-One —" he named them — "dying off like flies. Pretty soon George'll be the only one left."

Nathan was relieved to find that, notwithstanding these gloomy tidings, old George always seemed cheerful, alert, and sprightly enough when they met; age had not withered him so far, Burke said to himself, and used to listen interestedly to his ancient chief's exposition of the questions of the day, even if his views were not especially illuminating or original.

"Now who's James K. Polk?" was Mr. Marsh's favorite expression of contempt and satire; "never heard of *him* before. What's James K. Polk ever done? By all accounts nothing but keep his head shut. A wooden man could do that!" — and so on, and so on; thus old George, stopping Burke on the corner where they have both lingered on the skirts of the crowd to listen to some gentleman of empurpled countenance and boundless lung capacity discuss the above point. They can hear the gathering cheer for the "Sage of Ashland" as they go on down the street. Everybody was the Somebody of Somewhere during this campaign — except Mr. Polk himself, who was the Nobody of Nowhere. The contest was close and there was plenty of cheering for both candidates. Nat used to hear it as he sat at the decent

and dignified desk which had replaced the pine table in his quarters above stairs over the shoemaker's, with the windows open and the summer breeze ruffling his papers. I can hear it now; forty years after I can hear the hurrahing and the bands tooting bravely; . . . "the country's risin' for Harry Clay and Frelinghuysen!" and I can see young Nat Burke, who will vote this fall, at his labors.

We did not see much of Sharpless these days; he was forever dashing about from one political hive to another in all parts of the State, and meeting many of the great ones of this earth. He wrote letters to his paper; you could recognize Jim's bright ridicule, his good-tempered irony, his plain man's logic. In all the crew of scribblers, I think he was the only one who wrote like a gentleman, and argued, denounced, or made fun with equal spirit and dignity. The shrieking demands of his fellow-Democrats to annex Texas, to settle the Oregon boundary at 54° 40′, or wade in blood, found no echo in Jim's sane and just and intelligent commentary; in fact, many would have thought the young fellow did not always regard these subjects with the gravity they deserved, treating, for instance, the "fifty-four-forty or fight" slogan of his party with ineradicable levity.

"It's right and proper to have convictions," he used to say solemnly; "but I can't get into any sweat over the Oregon boundary. It's too far away!"

All this while, let it be observed, there was a third party in the field, and creating some commotion; namely, that same devoted band of martyrs or fanatics, which you choose, who had figured forlornly in the Harrison-Van Buren campaign, and wore the title of Abolitionists. Now they appeared as the Liberty Party, with a substantial increase of following, and under the leadership, as before, of Mr. Birney, who this time had not refused the nomination; twice on the Lupercal had they offered him a kingly crown, which he finally accepted — with, as he knew and everybody else knew, no more chance of winning at the polls than if he had been the Great Cham of Tartary. Yet the party had undoubtedly gained ground; there was some faint talk about the "balance of power"; I think both Whigs and Democrats, if they did not exactly court the Liberty Party, at least behaved with one eye to its opinions. And it was very generally believed after the

election that many Abolitionists had actually voted with the Whigs, whose sentiments more nearly agreed with their own. They had adopted a spirited set of resolutions, full of brave and outspoken truths, which either a Whig or a Democrat would have been put to his trumps to answer. The fact was, nobody did answer them; in some places they were laughed at, in some sympathized with, in some pelted with rotten eggs. All these varieties of treatment were accorded them in our State — in spite of a pretty strong and steadily growing anti-slavery feeling — and it fell to Burke's lot to witness one reception of an Abolitionist speaker — even to take part in it.

"Father *will* go around and speechify on this slavery business," Jim Sharpless told his friend with an anxious face; "he did at the last election, you know, and begged for 'em, and wrote and preached and worked night and day —"

"I remember him coming into Mr. Marsh's office with a committee, after a subscription," Nat said. He described the meeting, and Jim listened with a half-smile, half-frown.

"Think of father doing that, Nat," he said, looking at the other with a flush on his lean cheeks; "nobody knows what it cost him. He's — he's a proud man, a high-tempered man — he hates from his inmost soul to ask for money — don't *I* know that? We're just alike — but I couldn't bend myself to do the things father does for duty's sake — I'm no such man as he is," said Jim, humbly. "He thinks it's required of him by God and the church and the cause of Abolition to go out and suffer all kinds of rebuffs and humiliations and sneers — and, by heavens, yes, Nat, the old man's run into actual bodily danger sometimes in these rough places where he's been making speeches. I don't know whether he knows it, but if he did, he'd go just the same and speak. He's not afraid of anything on this earth."

"Couldn't your mother, or — or Miss Mary persuade him not to? I should think he'd do anything for *her* — for them, I mean," asked Burke.

"Mother or Mary? Pooh! Why, Nat, you *know* better than that. I'd like to see anybody stop Jonathan Sharpless when he thinks he's doing his duty — or when he's got his head set, it amounts to the same thing," said his son with almost a laugh; "I tell you, though, some of these other old

Abolition boys realize when there're rocks ahead, and are entirely willing to crawfish out of trouble. I met old Elder Williams — you know him, don't you, the one that has the soap-boiling and refinery concern down on Front Street, he's a great light in the church and the Liberty Party — I say I saw him on the street the other day, and I naturally expected him to pass me by on the other side, as long as he hasn't recognized me for years. But this time, didn't he linger along with one eye on me and a sort of expression as if he'd speak if he was sure the Almighty wasn't keeping tab on him! So I stopped — *I* haven't any responsibilities, and I never heard of anything against Elder Williams," said Jim, with great seriousness. "'How do you do, Mr. Williams?' says I affably. 'Hum — ha — how do you do, *James?* I — hum — ha — *I read your book with great interest* — hum — ha — we haven't seen much of you lately, James — hum — ' I might have told him he hadn't looked," said Jim, grinning; "but I didn't. The fact is, Nathan, I was a good deal floored by this notice. It looked to me as if the old gentleman had something more particular to say, and didn't quite know how to get himself started. I told him I had been out of town more or less all summer, going around from one political meeting to another. That seemed to help him along a little; he wanted to know if I thought — hum — the Whigs were going to carry the State? 'Why, Mr. Williams,' said I, 'it seems to me it's a pretty close thing between Clay and Polk. You know I — ahem — I see all kinds of men, and I have to go into all kinds of places, and I notice that the — ahem — the betting is very heavy both ways. There's a great deal of enthusiasm, and absolute confidence.' I put this with rather an apologetic air — you don't want to talk to a deacon about *betting* and all that you know — but elder Williams never turned a hair! Only looked interested and thoughtful and hum-ha'd several times, until, by jingo, Nat, I began to think he wanted to get a fifty or so down on Clay or Polk himself! 'I may as well be plain, Mr. Williams,' says I, wishing to change the subject and lead him from temptation; 'as far as I can see your party hasn't the ghost of a show. I dare say you never had any solid expectation of success anyhow. At the last election Birney and Lemoyne polled seven thousand and odd

votes, I understand; and this time there'll be more — ten times as many — seven or eight thousand, I haven't a doubt, right here in Ohio alone. So you might say that your views are receiving some endorsement. It's not wholly discouraging.' Now, Nat, if I'd said that to father, he would have raised up, looking like an ancient Hebrew prophet, and thundered out something about Truth is mighty and SHALL prevail, and the Blood of the Martyrs is the Seed of the Church, and so on. But Elder Williams is a practical old soap-boiler, and I could see he was a good deal put out over the whole business. He got quite confidential and complaining — knowing, of course, that he could talk to an outlaw like me without restraint. He said he was against slavery, of course, he believed any humane man would be against it; but he thought — hum — ha — the time was not ripe to throw it off. He was of opinion — ha — that there was little or no use in going around and rabidly denouncing so solidly established an institution; that it only provoked ill-feeling and, — er — in short, was a waste of time and — hum — money. He had not quite understood the aims and methods of the Liberty Party in the beginning, and doubted whether he would have — er — allied himself with them, if he had known what he was going into, in short. He had personally contributed to their campaign-fund, and — hum — he considered that money as much thrown away as water through a sieve. He had even been obliged to go with other members of his committee into very low parts of the city and county, full of rowdies and blacklegs, where he thought it was a needless risk to send a man of his age, and that he wouldn't give a — a fig for all the converts made in those districts; any respectable man would rather have 'em against him than with him! 'Now, for instance, James,' he said (he was getting pretty well warmed up by this time), 'I am expected to go with — with your father, who is to speak, down to one of those resorts near the river — Harmony Hall, I think they call the place, probably *you* know all about it — next Tuesday night. They've promised us a constable — but I consider it a preposterous undertaking for both of us, even if it did any good, and it *don't*. I have endeavored to dissuade your father, but he is quite set on it. I — I really don't know whether I'll be able to go — hum — ha —

Mrs. Williams is not at all well, and I don't like to leave her — and we — er — we're expecting my brother's wife with her children from Pittsburgh and — er — I — I'm very busy at the factory, so that I doubt if I can spare the time. I thought likely you didn't know about this meeting, and while I wouldn't like to take it on myself, I — um — I would suggest that you attend it, and use your — um — your influence with — um — those people, to keep order.' Don't laugh, Nat. The old fellow meant well," Jim wound up; "and it's only common sense for him to keep out of such a place."

On sober thought, one could not but agree with Elder Williams's fight-and-run-away, or rather run-away-without-fighting policy. Harmony Hall was the chief ornament of that part of the city called "The Bottoms," long since swept out and purified. It was a vile locality — we did not have the word *slum* then, but much as slum stands for, even it might scarcely have described The Bottoms. The prospect of poor Mr. Sharpless carrying his already hopeless crusade amongst that population of pickpockets, drabs, and desperadoes — not a few of them black, or colored, by the way — where it was a common and facetious saying that for fifty cents you could hire a man to vote for Beelzebub and go to Hell to do it, too, for that matter — I say the idea of addressing these worthies in the cause of Abolition would have been funny, if it had not been so disquieting. It was of a piece with the kind of noble futility, the baseless altruism which distinguished not alone Jim's father, but many another enthusiast on the anti-slavery side. Did not the Saviour of mankind visit and dwell with publicans and sinners, they thought. And are we not all enjoined to carry the Gospel unto the heathen?

Jim recited his conversation with Elder Williams — whom he mimicked to admiration — with abundant dry and droll humor; yet he was seriously perturbed by his father's plans. It should be explained, in justice to two tolerably decent young men, that neither of them was at all familiar with The Bottoms district — whatever Mr. Williams had hinted — Burke, indeed, having been there only once in his whole life, at the time he was hunting for Nance Darnell. Harmony Hall itself was a ramshackle tenement, whereof the upper

story was let out as some kind of rooming-house, I think, and the entire first floor thrown into one big dance-hall. The Bottoms congregated and held festivities there by night under the domain of a wretched old ruffianly saloon and dive keeper, called White Hat Sam; — if he had another name, nobody ever heard it. The dances generally broke up in a wholesale row; somebody was forever being robbed, beaten, shot, or stabbed in Harmony Hall — whence, I suppose, it had acquired its ironic title, bestowed with that extraordinary, half-malicious levity which, as a people, we sometimes display towards things sad and disgraceful enough in themselves. But, on Tuesday night, when, having elected to see the Reverend Sharpless (as he was most commonly styled) through this particular experience, the son and his friend arrived on the spot, it was, if not as quiet as might have been wished, still as quiet as most political gatherings of that date, according to Jim, who was thoroughly versed in them by this. "They aren't exactly sewing-circles," he said. The street was full of sinister-looking loungers, all the grog-shops were in full blast, and Harmony Hall itself showed a great illumination of smoking, stinking, dripping oil-lamps with battered tin reflectors, and some rags of red, white, and blue bunting strung here and there in decoration. Within there was a good-sized audience already collected and standing about, leaning against the walls, or sprawled on the steps of the speaker's platform at the upper end of the room. The band was probably stationed there on ordinary occasions, for there was a piano going full-tilt, and a burly songster in a red waistcoat and collarless shirt was raucously discoursing campaign airs. Everybody smoked, chewed, spat, drank, talked at the top of his lungs, all at once, but the disorder was no worse than it might have been anywhere; and Sharpless and his companion were surprised and relieved. Nevertheless when a sallow, shifty-eyed youth in a grimy apron came up proffering liquor, they thought it the part of prudence to buy a drink apiece. "When you're in Rome —" Jim whispered; "I shouldn't wonder if we were being watched every minute. They've got their eyes peeled for all strangers, you know — and White Hat might gently drop us in the cistern if we didn't buy his execrable stuff."

"Ain't been here very recent, have yer?" inquired the pot-

boy with a rather startling appropriateness, returning at the moment from another customer. He arranged the glasses on his slopped tray to make room for theirs. "Thank ye, sir. Old place looks jest th' same, don't it?" he added with as open a smile as his features, which were not constructed by Nature for any such expression, could compass.

"Just the same," said Jim, smoothly. "And there's my old friend Leroux at the piano!" The boy eyed us plainly puzzled; but indeed it was Leroux, whom Mr. Burke had never had the honor of meeting before, a withered, dirty, shaking, poor wretch, old as the hills, and about three-parts drunk; yet the crazy instrument responded with something like fire and precision under his begrimed, unsteady hands. He embraced Jim (in the French fashion on both cheeks to the huge delight of the bystanders) when the latter presented himself. "*Mon cher — mon enfant — est-ce bien toi que je tiens dans mes bras!*" says old Leroux, weeping profusely; and peered up at him a little bewildered with his bleary old eyes. "Vat it ees, your name, hein? I haf forgot — *ah, cette vilaine memoire —!*"

"My name's Jim," said the other, warily.

"*Ah, oui, je me rappelle — ce cher Jeem —*" It is much to be doubted whether he did remember, however; but he insisted on their taking another drink out of the bottle and tumbler beside him on the piano; the Harmony Hallers looked on, wondering and amused.

"Don't they furnish chairs, sir?" Burke inquired — by way of being sociable — of a gentleman who, with his shoulder propped against the wall near by, was diligently picking his teeth with a pen-knife. He wiped it on his coat-sleeve, snapped it shut, and thrust it into his breeches-pocket before answering, regarding them the while speculatively.

"Chairs — hell!" he then observed negligently: "No — Sam don't never have chairs any more. He ain't made o' money, ye know." A remark which, although apparently irrelevant, was not without a certain ominous significance. They took a position close to the dais at the imminent risk of being deafened by the musical performance; and in no great while afterwards the speaker of the evening came in, unattended, with a little rather ironical cheering (one of us fancied) in his wake as he walked up to his place. Mr. Sharpless

heard it unmoved; he was too used to public speaking to be flustered by any ordinary reception; he mounted the steps in a momentary hush and went over and began to arrange his notes on the squalid table under one of the lamps as calmly as if he had been in his own pulpit of a Sunday morning, with his flock decorously awaiting the Word of God. The present congregation surveyed him with a kind of jocose ferocity; their sense of humor was probably deeply tickled by the incongruous spectacle of Mr. Sharpless's long, lean, rigid black figure and Mosaic countenance in this Harmony Hall setting. They manifestly wanted to see what he was going to do; and when some wit loudly advised him from the floor to "Go it, Daddy Longlegs! Give the — hell!" he was summarily and not too gently silenced by his neighbors. One of those most active in promoting quiet was a short, stout, thick-necked man with greasy gray hair under his old shabby headgear. "White Hat Sam," murmured Jim, nudging his friend; and this celebrity presently came up, and slouched heavily down on the step not far away; he must have been upwards of sixty years old, Burke observed with surprise.

"If you will kindly come to order, my friends," said Mr. Sharpless, coming forward with his papers in one hand, and fumbling for his eye-glasses with the other. He was not immediately heard, and repeated the words, raising his voice, without effect. "Order, if you please, gentlemen!" cried the divine again, peering at the crowd with his near-sighted eyes over his spectacles. White Hat Sam looked up at him, grinning obscenely. Still the meeting did come to order — after a fashion — in a moment or two; it seemed to Burke as if the moving spirit of all these demonstrations, whether to instigate riot or preserve peace, was the proprietor. They took their cue from him; yet he sat motionless, heavy, and inert as a Hindoo idol. And Mr. Sharpless began.

The first part of his address — nobody ever heard the last — was, as I remember, a sort of history of Slavery in the United States, and would have been interesting enough to any other audience. It is very common at this day (said Mr. Sharpless) to speak of our revolutionary struggle as commenced and carried forward by a union of Free and Slave colonies; but such is not the case. However slender and dubi-

ous its legal basis, Slavery existed in each and all of the colonies that united to declare and maintain their independence. . . . The spirit of liberty aroused and intensified by the protracted struggle against usurped and abused power in the mother country. . . . How, my friends, shall we complain of arbitrary and unlimited power exerted over us, while we exert a still more despotic and inexcusable power over a dependent and benighted race?

It was at about this point that the audience began to show unequivocal signs of restlessness; the pot-boy was circulating like a comet; somebody in the middle of the hall wanted to know if the gentleman had made any remarks reflecting on Dorr of Rhode Island,[1] because Dorr of Rhode Island was — "Do you mean front-Dorr, or back-Dorr?" some other patron of Harmony Hall inquired; references to all kinds of doors flew thick and fast in a rising racket; and a wag standing near proceeded to give a loud, clear, and brilliant imitation of a rooster crowing, being desirous apparently of adding his mite to the tumult, whether appropriately or not. It was a tremendous success; in an instant the place roared with every sort of farm-yard sound: barkings, brayings, mooings, gruntings, and snortings, as of Circe's herds. "Order, if you please, my friends — order — one moment —" cried Mr. Sharpless, startled and dropping some of his papers, a little confused. "Order, if you please, my friends, order!" repeated the ventriloquist, his neighbor, in an amazingly exact yet caricatured imitation. Mr. Sharpless tried again to go on; he had lost his place. . . . "Human brotherhood, my friends, is a cardinal principle of true Democracy as well as of pure Christianity —" "True Democracy as well as pure Christianity!" crackled his tormentor. "Keep quiet, Jim, you can't do anything," urged Burke, grasping his companion's arm. They were being a good deal hustled and shoved about, yet there was nothing to arouse one so far; all this rough behavior was such as might have been met with in a roomful of uncommonly boisterous schoolboys, and merely conveyed to the orator in a sufficiently good-humored manner that The Bottoms had had

[1] The newspapers of the date are full of the affair of Governor Dorr of Rhode Island, and are freely recommended to those who have the patience to read about it; the editor had not. — M. S. W.

enough of him. If Mr. Sharpless had taken the hint, if Jim had kept his temper, if there hadn't been quite so much of White Hat Sam's fire-water going the rounds — but to what end are all these speculations? The succeeding events took place with a stunning suddenness; one moment it was a lot of noisy, jolly, blaspheming bullies, and the next a cage of wolves, a den of hyenas! Burke, still holding his friend's arm, had just been obliged to jerk his other elbow into the eye of an over-inquisitive gentleman who was feeling in his vest-pocket, when they saw a man, in a burst of Harmony Hall humor shy something at the speaker (who was vainly trying to continue), some small object, a rotten potato or tomato, perhaps. It struck the Reverend Mr. Sharpless on the cheek-bone, not hurting him at all, I think, but knocked off his glasses and shattered them, to the great delight of the joker and those nearest in the audience who witnessed this feat. Sharpless twisted out of his companion's grip.

"You'll strike an old man, will you, you — !" he gasped out in a fury, gritting his teeth on a dreadful curse; "take that, — you !" And struck him in the face and sent him reeling. Jim was not a very strong man, and he hit out with no science at all, but the attack took the other by surprise; he went down on the steps of the platform, and upon the instant Harmony Hall burst into its brutal rage.

I suppose it is strange that we ever got out of the place alive and unharmed; but barring bruises and torn coats, we found ourselves whole in the end. Perhaps the very size and closeness of the crowd and the imperfect light saved us; for only comparatively few, and those in the front ranks, could have seen what passed; and doubtless in the minds of many the fellow whom Jim had knocked down had not got a blow amiss. The Bottoms had very little sympathy to waste on the vanquished; the fight was the thing with them. We charged up the steps over the prostrate foe — whose nose was bleeding grandly — and got to Mr. Sharpless and each got hold of one of his arms. "Gentlemen —" he protested, backing away; without his glasses he did not for a second recognize either of us; he wanted to go on with the speech. "If you will allow me, gentlemen —!"

"You've got to come away, father!" shouted Jim in his ear; "come along, I say. There's a door over here —" Another

missile hurtled from somewhere; it went over our heads and struck one of the lamps, putting it out in a fountain of broken glass. The singer, with admirable judgment and agility, dived down and crawled on all fours under the piano. "By —, boys, you better git th' old man out o' this!" he bawled disinterestedly; and even in that wild moment, Burke saw, and remembered afterwards, how this kind-hearted ruffian reached out and dragged poor old Leroux after him into a corner of safety. Men were swarming on to the platform as they made for the door. It was securely locked, however, and they seemed to be fairly cornered. Jim shoved Mr. Sharpless (still protesting! He was not in the least frightened) behind the table, and Nat scrambled up on it, facing the room from this commanding height. As he did so some secret sympathizer — yes, even in that place! — stuffed something into his hand; it was the butt of a pistol. "Take it, bub, take it; you're going to need it!" was growled hoarsely in his ear. He never even saw this man's face, nor ever knew who it was that had sought to befriend him. For then and there, Mr. Burke made what was practically his first and last appearance as a public speaker. "Men!" he bellowed; and being possessed of a good strong throat and a fine pair of lungs, and having, moreover, seized by chance upon a moment when the uproar fell a little, he actually succeeded in making himself heard.

"Men!" shouted Nat; "somebody has just handed me this pistol. If the gentleman will step up, I'd like to return it —" and this invitation produced, for a wonder, a dead silence of sheer curiosity. As the owner of the pistol discreetly preserved his incognito — "Very well!" said Burke, and tossed the weapon out of the window. "I don't think we need a pistol in a gathering of American citizens!" he remarked at the top of his lungs, and with the inward certainty that some of us, at any rate, would never need pistols more in our lives! But the bluff worked! This resounding sentiment brought forth a round of applause and encouraging yells. "Go on! Speech, speech!" Never was there such a violent reversal of popular feeling; it was but momentary, as Burke knew; yet, looking down on them, of a sudden he perceived that this pack of rascals were at least as much fools as knaves. They were flighty and inconsequent,

like a flock of sparrows; at once silly and bloody-minded, turning from one excitement to another with an incredible childishness.

"I'm not here to do any talking," he said; "I only want to say that the Reverend Mr. Sharpless is ready to go on if you —"

"Aw, shut him up! Say, sonny, does yer mother know yer out?" shouted somebody. And Burke, looking in that direction, discovered it to be the proprietor, White Hat Sam himself, who, for some reason of his own, did not appear to be over-pleased with the peaceable face affairs were now beginning to wear.

"You were saying, sir?" inquired Nat, civilly.

"Shut up, we don't want to be gassed at by no boys like you. By God, young feller, I was making my living before you were born!"

"Well, then, by God, sir, you haven't made it since!" retorted Burke, briskly. And this not particularly brilliant repartee, addressed to White Hat Sam, who probably had never done a stroke of honest labor in his life, moved our fellow-citizens to a frenzied hilarity. Lo, who so well-liked now as Mr. Burke and his supporters? They were actually willing to hear Mr. Sharpless out, but the minister himself seemed to have changed his mind and refused in a few grave words. The singer came out of retirement (leaving Leroux, who was dead drunk by this time, and snoring peacefully) and struck up "Whigs of the Union," which was set to the tune of the "Marseillaise," and under cover of its enthusiastic chorus we all three got away at last. Mr. Sharpless said not a word on the trip home. The stars were shining as we parted from him at the gate, but it was too dusky beneath the low-branched maples along the sidewalk by the parsonage to distinguish his expression.

"I wish you good-night, gentlemen. I thank you both," he said.

"I hope, Mr. Sharpless, you — you are not going to speak in that neighborhood again?" said Burke, hesitating.

"I am not. Sir, I have made my last speech," said the minister. He kept his word. Outside the pulpit, he never spoke publicly again.

The election for governor was held the second week in October at that time, in advance of the Presidential by three or four weeks; and it served, we used to think, as a sort of feeling of the political pulse. Nobody had ever heard of registration as yet, and we understood there was a rousing trade in ballot-stuffing, in repeating, in illegal naturalization, in chicanery, bribery, and corruption of all kinds; the papers on both sides were full of gloomy warnings against it; no candidate, according to the opposition, was ever elected without a most barefaced and vicious resort to these methods. In this campaign, BRITISH GOLD first appeared as an awful agent of corruption, the most astonishing thing about it being the naïveté with which we complained of being corrupted! Not yet has that ridiculous old spectre been laid. But Messrs. Sharpless and Burke were perhaps not in a position to pass judgment on these statements; nobody approached with offers to corrupt them in behalf of either Clay or Polk. They went soberly and cast their maiden votes; Ohio went Whig, securing twenty-three votes in the electoral college for Clay. Hurrah, hurrah, the country's risin'—!

Alas for all these high expectations! Look on this picture — and now on this! Alas for Henry Clay, for his single-minded followers, for Ewing, for Corwin, for Samuel Gwynne (the latter retired from public life after this campaign), for everybody who had talked his throat out in the good cause, and contributed his money, and spent his time! In a month how were we all dashed by the news that the Polk-stalks, the Polk-berries, the Loco-focos, the Coon-catchers, had triumphed after all! "We are beaten, *badly* beaten," said the *Journal*, in dignified mourning; "but let us not despair. Let us not cease to do our utmost as good citizens, and whatever comes, even the worst results of our adversaries' blind and reckless policy, even WAR with all its train of horrors, even BANKRUPTCY and DESPOTISM, let us, etc. . . ."

"If we *should* have war over Oregon or Texas, would you go, Nat," his friend asked him.

"Why, yes — yes, I suppose so. But, pshaw, it's all talk — we won't have any war."

CHAPTER XXII

Contains both Peace and War

All this time, with a culpable negligence, I have forgot even to glance at the affairs of Mr. George Marsh Ducey — surely of no slight moment to this history. The fact is, Nathan, who was a busy, or, at least, an industrious young man, had latterly seen very little of George, for whose society he did not have a strong inclination — the feeling was mutual, without a doubt. We had worn out that ancient joke about George's prowess in the ranks of medicine; for, disgusted with the narrowness of Vardaman's views, and his contemptible prejudice against rising talent, George had left the doctor's office. He shook the dust of that poor abode of small scholarship and less skill from his feet; he was by nature too compassionate and too sensitive to the sight of suffering ever to have relished the calling anyhow, he said. There was a kind of crooked truth in the statement. As a boy, Burke remembered to have seen George faint at the sight of fresh blood; and whereas the other boys gathered in a ghoulish mob to witness the decapitation of poultry or drowning of superfluous kittens, George would run screaming to his mother from the horrid spectacle. So he left Vardaman finally after about fifteen or eighteen months in the doctor's office, as nearly as I recollect, and for a while returned to the store, where he probably was as valuable as he had been in Burke's day, and certainly even more ornamental. As George grew older his taste for dress and the minute elegancies of life developed to a high degree. His choice in cravats, upholstery, ladies' bonnets, was well-nigh infallible; his mother relied on him to match her silks and worsteds to a shade — and, at a pinch, he could have worked with them upon her embroidery-frame, I dare say. No pent-up

Utica contracted George's powers, a whole unbounded continent of accomplishments was his — to parody the handsome motto which Mr. Park Benjamin had selected for his paper, the *New World*, published about this time. Work at the store palling on him after an interval, as I have hinted, the next thing we heard was that George was studying law; myself have seen him, hurrying along the street, intent, abstracted, with a forehead corrugated like a Greek column, and a green baize bag bulging with books and papers under one arm, fruit of his legal studies. He too was in Governor Gwynne's office! For let nobody imagine for an instant that George did not display any stern masculine traits; it is possible for a man to be, as he was, extraordinarily proficient in the gracious arts of dancing and dressing and matching ribbons, while at the same time a very serious, valorous, formidable member of society. He was not eligible to vote at this last election, although he must certainly have felt himself competent to direct the policy of either candidate, having given the subject, as he himself told Mr. Burke, a thorough and exhaustive study; but he attended some of the meetings. You might see George in an erect attitude at some conspicuous corner with his arms folded, listening to the orator with a fatigued smile, or an occasional slight critical and thoughtful frown, and glancing about tolerantly when others applauded. George never applauded. He was only moved to pity by the view of so many of his fellow-citizens so easily wrought upon by the feeble logic which he could have exposed and demolished in three words. His leanings were distinctly Democratic; according to him the one fact in Clay's favor was that ingrained habit of satisfying an insult with bloodshed, which most people condemned! "Pooh, what would they have a man do?" cried out George, with spirit; "sit down patiently under a blow or an affront! I'd like to see anybody try it on with me, that's all!"

Naturally enough, holding these sentiments, Mr. Ducey was a vigorous opponent of British aggression. "Fifty-four-forty-or-fight" was, as one might say, the breath of his nostrils; he used to quote, with a devout rage, all the clamors of our press about English interference on this continent: .... "We now hear that Great Britain has advised Mexico *under no circumstances* to acknowledge the inde-

pendence of Texas; but to keep up an armistice with her as long as possible; and in case of a successful attempt at annexation, then *to go to war and England would back her in the contest!!!*"

"By heavens, it makes my blood boil!" says George, savagely, pulling up his shirt-collar and throwing out his chest as he gazes around the peaceful family-circle seated at dinner, after reading out this trustworthy piece of news; "by heavens, if I was Polk, I know what *I'd* do!" His mother, knowing George's martial tastes — he lately joined a militia company in high repute with us, the "Montgomery Guards," knew more about military dress and accoutrements than any living mortal except the tailors, and paraded on the Fourth of July in all his gilt braid and regimentals, the most dashing and distinguished soldier of the lot — his mother looks at him with fearful and tender eyes. Even Francie, who is not an imaginative young woman, appears to be somewhat impressed. Old George Marsh alone sits there, callously sopping his bread in gravy and eating his stewed corn with a spoon, quite unmoved by George's heroic utterances. He lost his last tooth the other day, and is seriously handicapped in his eating, not being able to endure the set of false "uppers and lowers" he sent for to New York. He complained to Burke that, by damn, he paid a hundred and twenty dollars for 'em, and never had a minute's comfort out of 'em; they kept jumping up and getting crossways in his mouth, by damn! He looks up, raising his shaggy old eyebrows in that familiar gesture: "Knock the stuffing out of 'em, hey, George?" he says. "You ain't any use for British gold, nor British anything, have you?"

"Sir, from any one else that would be an insult!" says George, majestically.

"All right, all right," says his uncle, in an humble voice, but grinning a truly Satanic grin; "I just wanted to know. I'm English myself, and I don't want to make any mistake and leave my money where it ain't wanted, that's all!" At which Mr. George's wrath cools off with surprising rapidity and a rather blank look on the young gentleman's face.

"You oughtn't to get irritated at Uncle George," his mother warns him afterwards; "he's getting very old and feeble, you know."

It was Jim Sharpless from whom Burke used to hear the details of these and like conversations. Jim was a pretty constant visitor at the house; it was always full nowadays, as in the years of Nathan's first acquaintance with it, of young men, pretty girls, children, singing and laughing, pianos going, guitars thrumming. Sharpless could mimic the older and younger Ducey, mimic old George, and everybody else to perfection, sparing no one but Mrs. Ducey, for whom he had a chivalric devotion, and — and Miss Frances Blake. He talked, I think, a good deal about Miss Frances Blake, although Burke, who was quite selfishly absorbed in a certain sentimental affair of his own, never noticed it. Jim said she could play the piano better than any one he knew. "Better than your sister?" said Burke, in wonder. As if any piano-playing could equal hers! Well, no, not better than Mary, perhaps, but Francie's — Miss Blake's, you know — was *different*. And then she had a very sweet voice, too; you ought to hear her sing: "True love can ne'er forget." — "But I suppose you have heard her," Jim said with a quick sigh, and fell silent. "I wish I could make a lot of money, Nat," he said, rousing himself again. "Well, I will some day, you see! I might close with that *Tribune* offer — I might go to New York — only —" and again he was silent, drumming with his fingers on the table. "By George, I'll show 'em yet!" he burst out: "'For his spirit it was tre-men-ju-ous —'" and went to correcting proofs with a laugh.

His mood, however, was not always so genial; sometimes he was depressed, sometimes severe, sometimes merely irritable, alternations of temper which Burke, not at all realizing that they mirrored some of his own, and are perhaps common to all lovers, observed with bewilderment. It seems to me now that if he had used his eyes and ears, to say nothing of his intelligence, he might have known what ailed Jim, and been a little more sympathetic.

"She looked so pretty to-night, Nat, so pretty. She had on some kind of a little dress with pink rosebuds spotted all over it, and — and pink ribbons somewhere, I think —"

"She? Who? Who're you talking about?" asked that thick-headed Nathan, looking up from his brief, agog at these millinery statistics from Jim.

"Why, Francie, of course," said the other, a little impatiently; "I've just come from there, you know. George was at home. I left him on the front porch, braying copiously," Jim added with venom; "the idea of that fellow being with her — being in the house where he can see her all the time! I believe she sees through George, though; she's known him all her life; she must know all about him, being brought up with him that way — just the kind of donkey he is, don't you think so, Nat?"

Sharpless, indeed, took a malign pleasure in drawing George out, and, as it were, parading him before the company — or before Francie, for all his efforts were directed with one eye on that young person's good graces. Perhaps she did not always understand all of Jim's sober irony; I believe she was a little afraid of him even when he was writing sprightly little epigrams in her album, and putting new words to her songs, and telling his gay stories, and drawing absurd sketches that made her laugh till she cried. One of them, which I have seen, depicted Jim himself, a monstrous caricature, gaunt and lath-like, supporting Francie in a sort of heraldic attitude upon the back of a chair. "The artist cannot do justice to the female figure in this design," he said gravely. "Don't you remember? It is a great historic occasion — a Fourth of July celebration in the old Methodist church years and years ago, when you were a wee little girl and were going to be smothered to death in the crowd, and I helped you up to the back of the pew and held you — don't you remember?" asked the young man, with his dark eyes on her wistfully.

"Mercy, no!" said Francie, reddening.

"I've never forgotten it," Jim said.

"She remembers everything *you* used to do, Nathan, every single thing, and often speaks about it," he afterwards said, in reciting this scene; and looked at his friend oddly.

"Well, that wouldn't be saying much. I never did anything particularly startling that I know of," Nat said with a laugh; "and I wasn't much of a hand to talk in those days. It's only because I was around the place for two years, and left a brilliant memory. By jingo, sir, you don't realize that I was the best chore-boy the Duceys ever had!"

In fact, the family made Mr. Burke welcome enough when

he went there in his altered rôle nowadays — *o, quantum mutatus ab illo Hectore!* as Jack Vardaman would have said — Mr. Ducey and George with a delicate, patronizing, and almost protecting kindness; Mrs. Ducey with a species of careful and stilted good manners that made Burke want to laugh. She was incapable of disguising the fact that for all people said (yes, even Francie's girl-friends, and her own friends, their mammas, said it!) about young Burke being a sufficiently well-behaved man, and doing nicely in his profession, *she* never could forget what he had been; and equally incapable of understanding that he was not at all touchy on the subject, nor anxious for her to forget that time. "I declare I never know what to say — it's like walking on eggs," Burke once overheard the poor lady complaining to a friend. "Why, my dear, he used to milk our cow! And here he is sitting in the parlor, not a bit different from anybody else. All the young men know him and treat him the same as one of themselves, you know. I'm so afraid I'll mention the cow or the chore-boy or something of the sort before him — of course, it wouldn't really be any harm, but I *want* to be *kind.* It's like when you meet a Jewish person or somebody that's been divorced, you know, something always seems to *impel* you to talk about Jews or divorced people! Mercy, I've done that so many times — and lain awake thinking about it, and wondering whether they were mad at me, all night long, haven't you? Uncle George says I needn't worry, because Nathan wouldn't mind a bit if I talked about chore-boys the whole livelong time — but I'm always *considerate* of people's feelings. I think I can say that much of myself anyhow. What? Oh, yes, he's doing very well, they say. Quite a practice for a young fellow."

Burke caught this exposition of Mrs. Ducey's views, through the open parlor window as he sat with Francie on the porch a summer evening; and both of them, lacking the presence of mind to cough or otherwise give notice of their near neighborhood, there they sat in some confusion throughout the entire speech, delivered in Mrs. Ducey's clear and ringing tones. Little Francie's face was a fine red, her eyes avoided Nat's, even when she saw the young man smiling broadly.

"Aunt Anne doesn't — that is, she — she doesn't mean,

Mr. Burke — I mean —" she faltered. Nathan looked at her sweet, shy, distressed face with a sudden deep tenderness. From the beginning he had felt like an elder brother to this little girl. She was his first friend; he even had a fancy that but for her he might never have been what he now was; the kind little hands had a firm hold on his heart-strings. And Francie grown-up, in long trains, with rosettes and lace capes and artificial flowers and a dozen wonderful fal-lals, was no different from Francie in pantalettes, with her thick brown hair braided down her back, as wholesome, as grave, straightforward, simple, and tender-hearted. He tried to tell her something of this, awkwardly, yet secure of her sympathy if not of her understanding.

"Why, Francie," he said, forgetting the "Miss Blake" with which he had schooled himself to address her; "you didn't think I could be hurt by that talk of your aunt's? It's true I myself seldom talk about the time when I was your uncle's hired man; but it seems to me it would be as silly to ram that down people's throats as it would be to be ashamed of it. It makes me think of a story Jim Sharpless tells about Geor — about some fellow that told him he was a gentleman. 'Sir, do you know I'm a gentleman?' says this man. 'All right, that settles it,' said Jim; 'when a man tells you he's a gentleman, that ends the argument. I haven't got anything more to say, sir!' Now you tell Mrs. Ducey, won't you, that she needn't fight shy of the subject. I was her hired man. Amen. I'm not any more. I believe I'm too good for a hired man — but I'm not going to go around blowing about it one way or the other. People always find their level, and end by being taken for what they are. There — there's hardly a person in the world that I'd talk to like this about myself except you —" he added, a little embarrassed, as he realized on a sudden the heat and energy of his words. Francie made an abrupt movement.

"Is — is that so, Nathan? Wouldn't you really?" she asked. She had been playing with the pink ribbons of her dress — it may have been that very dress Jim had so admired — rolling them up and smoothing them out again; and she now looked up quickly and very earnestly with her eyes on the other's face.

"Of course it's so. You've always understood even when

you were a little thing — there never will be anybody quite the same to me as you, Francie — you don't mind my telling you that, do you — ?"

"No, I — I don't mind," said Francie in a small voice; and leaned back with her face in the shadow of the vine.

"I never had a sister — but I like to pretend that if I had, she'd be just like you, your age, and — and just the way you are," said Nat. "Don't you remember your quarter? I've got it still; I'm going to keep it always. You once said you'd like me to when I was going away and wouldn't be chore-boy any more — do you remember that? You were always the dearest little girl, always!"

"Oh, you've said that hundreds of times!" said Francie, jumping up; "I'm tired of — of sitting here. I want to go in where the others are — let's go in!"

So they went in, Burke more or less worried at some inexplicable change in her manner, and observing that she did, in fact, look weary and out of spirits in the strong lamplight. But she revived presently when Sharpless came in, and was quite gay and vivacious for the rest of the evening. Nat and his friend did not often meet at this house to which the latter seemed so attracted, Burke preferring the parlor and piano and society of another young lady, whom he visited nowadays more frequently and with much more confidence than heretofore. Did Jim notice it? Somehow or other her brother is the last person on earth in whom a lover will confide. And although Nat had scarcely a thought or plan which he did not talk over with Sharpless, he never mentioned this dearest thought, this most cherished plan of all. No; instead, Mr. Burke must hunt up an unfortunate youth, that same young Lewis with whom he had made his legal studies, and pour out to him all his hopes, fears, raptures. In after years he blushed to recall this folly; hardly could he recognize his own normally sober and taciturn character under this obsession. He has sat in shame and admiring astonishment, remembering the unfailing patience, and good-humor, and serious attention with which the other received him. It would seem as if a young man must talk at such a time or burst, boil over with his frank and fervid egotism — I — my — me — she! One trembles to figure what might happen if he could not thus relieve himself; and un-

luckily for Lewis, Mr. Nat could not, for obvious reasons, employ his other close friend, Dr. Vardaman, as a safety-valve.

Yet Jack was no longer to be regarded as a dangerous rival; he was some years the senior of us all, and fast becoming, in the popular estimation, a settled old bachelor. Already he displayed certain middle-aged tastes about his table, his wine, his clothes. Jack Vardaman would never marry anybody, people said, and they would pity the girl if he did; he was just as *set!* But that old affair with Louise Gwynne — Louise Andrews — six or seven years ago, that finished Jack Vardaman; he'd never look at another woman. He liked to stay at home in the evenings, reading his worn, dog's-eared, and be-pencilled copy of Horace, while Miss Clara knitted tidies by the lamp on the other side of the mahogany table, and the cat purred on the hassock between them. They lived in great comfort; the doctor spent a good deal of money on his hobbies — a trait which, of itself, indicated that he had not the makings of a first-rate husband and family man. He had cases of books sent out to him from Paris, London, Amsterdam; and portfolios of beautiful steel-engravings and prints — "what he wants with them I'm sure I don't know," his sister said in gentle complaint; "ever so many of the books are dreadful old things with those worn-out leather bindings that come off in crumbs all over his clothes — he says they're *first editions*, you know, and for all they're so shabby, it positively scares me to think of the prices he pays for them. And those pictures have to stay in the portfolios, Mr. Burke — he won't *hear* of having them framed — such a job to dust and take care of! Not that I mind, of course; I love to do things for John," she added hastily.

Miss Clara had got over all her first diffidence with Burke; his companionship with the doctor, his frequent appearance at her well-provided and always most beautifully appointed table, the good-feeling manifested towards him by her poodle and Angora — all these things had gradually made a place for him in her maidenly heart. He never came in without carefully dusting off his boots — he was punctual to the moment when invited to a meal — he took off his coat and hung a picture for her — he had such nice white teeth —

what higher recommendations could a young man need? Burke himself was genuinely fond of the doctor's sister, who, for all her naïveté and her odd little nervous ways, was a kind and sensible and not at all dull woman; and, strange to say, much more tolerant of masculine practices and peculiarities and faults than many an experienced wife and mother. "I have my sister very well trained," Jack used to say, sitting at his end of the table and looking over the handsome silver and glassware to where Miss Clara smiled at him from behind the urn; "observe, gentlemen: she has no objection to the institution of the night-key, that familiar bone of contention. She would let me keep my boots on the parlor mantelpiece, if I wanted to. When I smash my thumb-nail with the hammer and swear ferociously, she merely remarks, 'Oh, dear!' and fetches the arnica —"

"You know you never swear, John!" cried out Miss Clara; "it's just his fun, Mr. Sharpless. And besides, he was opening that last case of books and the hammer slipped and hurt him dreadfully — *anybody* would have sworn — Jack couldn't help it."

"She sees no harm in a drink or a game of billiards," pursued Vardaman. "Is there a woman in this town of whom you could say that?"

"Really, John, you'll make them think I'm awful," said Miss Vardaman, anxiously; "I know men oughtn't to — but, dear me, I've done awfully bad things in my life, too — not drinking nor playing billiards, you know, but things I oughtn't to have done, and —"

The doctor got up from his chair and went to her, and took her pretty hand and kissed it with a grave bow and flourish. "Take that, oh, very bad woman, you who spend your whole life making me such a very good home," he said. "Gentlemen, tell the truth: Did you ever see so happy a married couple?"

And as the friends paced home that night, smoking in the pleasant summer darkness, they remarked to each other, as they had many times before, that from one point of view Vardaman would make a great mistake to marry. No wife would give him his sister's worship, her unselfish devotion, her tireless thought. But, to tell the truth, there seemed to be very little prospect of marriage for either one of them. Miss Clara would not have dreamed of deserting her brother,

and it looked less and less likely that Jack would ever make a change.

"I'm so glad the doctor won't go to the war," she told Burke one day; "at least he's promised me he won't — I made him promise me, and John always keeps his word!" She was very much excited, with a bright color in her fading cheeks; her knitting-needles rattled tremulously. Burke looked at her in amazement and some perplexity.

"War?" he said; "where? what war?"

"Why, with — with Texas — no, I mean it's Mexico, isn't it, Mr. Burke? Or with England — anyway, Jack says it's bound to come, so I made him promise he wouldn't enlist. And Mr. Sharpless's sermon last Sunday — you were there, weren't you, I thought I saw you walking home with Mary — about [1]woe to them that devise iniquity, and about their coveting the fields and taking them away by violence, was just meant for Texas or the Mexicans or the English, I don't know which, but everybody said so." She paused, out of breath, knitting vehemently.

"Oh, well, we're not at war yet. I guess we'd better not cross that bridge till we come to it, had we?" said Burke, amused. "Anyhow, it won't be with England, Miss Vardaman; it will be with Mexico, — and we won't have any trouble licking *them*," said the young fellow, arrogantly, voicing the supreme self-confidence of his day.

"But I thought they were saying all that about the English wanting to fight us in — in Mexico, on account of their wanting to be annexed, you know," said poor Miss Clara, helplessly; "I can't get it straight in my head somehow."

"No wonder. That's just all newspaper talk — just balderdash!" Burke explained contemptuously; "the Texans do want to be annexed, there can't be any doubt about that, and I shouldn't wonder if there'd be trouble on that account, maybe, — not war, you know, but serious trouble. But Great Britain would be neutral in any case. Don't you remember that letter of the English Prime Minister, or whatever his position is, Lord Aberdeen? Where he said they'd be glad to see Texas admitted if slavery were to be done away with, but that England would keep out of it,

[1] See Micah ii. 1, 2.

because it wasn't any of her affair — words to that effect, you know. He was perfectly honest and meant every word of it, and I thought it was a fine letter," declared Mr. Burke, with warmth; "we're all the time marching around with a chip on our shoulder."

"Why, no, you haven't any chip, Mr. Burke — I'm sure I never saw *anybody* with a chip!" said Miss Clara, astounded; "I don't see how you could keep one there."

"I meant figuratively."

"Oh, *figuratively!*"

"We're all the time marching around in front of England, and suspecting her of all kinds of low, underhand tricks, and the English are constantly doing very noble and manly things — like suppressing the slave-trade, for instance."

"Yes, I suppose so," assented the lady, rather tepidly; "at least that's the way John talks — but John *knows*. Anyway the Oregon boundary fuss is all over, isn't it? That's what mixed me up so about Texas. Last year everybody was wanting to fight England about Oregon. And when it was settled, and they had signed all the treaties and everything, I just thought, 'Well there! We won't hear anything more about England for one while!' And here they began right away about England and Texas — no, Mexico — no, Texas, isn't it? So confusing! John's not going anyhow. Now just don't say anything for a minute, will you, Mr. Burke? I might get interested, and lose my place, you know, I have to count the stitches right here — one too many would throw the pattern all out of shape."

I dare say in hundreds of homes all over the land during that winter and spring of '46, worried wives, mothers, and sisters were exacting like promises from their restless menfolk. That cloud no larger than a man's hand, which has done yeoman's duty in metaphor for generations, had appeared upon our horizon; it was spreading daily, daily growing more black and menacing. It had threatened since San Jacinto, since the Alamo, since Stephen Austin and the earliest settlers first set foot in Texan territory. I think, in the very nature of things, in human nature, it was impossible to avert this struggle; the Democratic triumph at the polls in the last election proved — if it proved nothing else —

the popularity of annexation measures, with war or without it. The opposite party did not hesitate to heap obloquy upon the heads of the President and his advisers, to warn, rebuke, solemnly and righteously condemn; but if Polk and the rest had been the apostles of peace and Quakerism, I do not see how they could have refused the war. It is idle to compare notes as to which nation began it, or whose was the just quarrel; you may labor through a dozen histories, and end with the conviction expressed in that sound and homely old saying that the Pot called the Kettle black. When it came to the point, which of us cared a jot for the blackness of either the Pot or the Kettle? The lust of fighting had been born in us and strengthened apace; Nat Burke, with all his talk about moderation and justice and common sense, was, at the long last, just as eager for the bloody, hellish, foolish business of war as the most rabid Democrat of them all, just as indifferent to reason, just as impatient of argument or compromise. The country was full of high-spirited, adventurous, cock-sure boys ready to rush into the lists the moment the trumpet should sound. I remember that the whole previous summer, before Congress passed the Joint Resolution and Texas entered the Union, before Taylor was ordered to the Border, before General Almonte asked the government at Washington for his passports — before and during all these exciting events, but while we were as yet in an uncertainty how it all would end, there was a great increase of zeal and enthusiasm manifest amongst all our militia bodies. There was more marching and drilling, more study of the manual of tactics and military manœuvres (Cooper's, recommended by the general-in-chief of the United States Army), more serious play at soldiering. Had not George Ducey joined? Mr. Burke joined, too, to the infinite amusement of his Democratic friends. "What, thou too, Brutus!" said Sharpless, in tragic accents, coming home and finding Nat's beautiful new regimentals spread out on the bed, and this good, peace-loving Whig contemplating them fondly; "then, Cæsar, fall!" said Jim — and did fall upon his own bed in spasms of whole-souled laughter. Nat grinned shamefacedly; he had just been elected captain of his company.

Somewhat to the disappointment, I will not say of Mr. Burke, but of the fire-eaters who were clamoring for battle,

there succeeded a sort of lull. To be sure, the President's message contained some carefully worded intimations of trouble existing; but relations had not yet been broken off. The internal affairs of our unfortunate neighbor were in violent disorder and approaching a crisis; much was to be expected from the exertions of that eminent diplomatist, Mr. John Slidell — of whom, strange to say, none of us had ever heard before — who was upon the point of departure to open negotiations with the Mexican Minister of Foreign Affairs, Señor de la Peña y Peña. Everything might yet be well. "As for war with Mexico on our part, it is out of the question," said the *Journal*, editorially. "It would be cowardice to strike a blow upon so weak and divided a foe, and folly in the extreme to resort to arms when a let-alone policy would accomplish all that *ultra* southern politicians may desire. . . . A few weeks, perhaps a few days, will tell us what will be the end of this Mexican business."

Oh, wise editor, man of much foresight, the end was already begun! As you sat at your ink-blurred table, turning off copy with the boy waiting at your elbow, as you shoved the wet sheets towards him, and got up and put off your mangy old office-coat, white at all the seams and much rubbed along the right sleeve, and horrid with paste and ink-stains, Santa Anna, released from prison and exile, may have been landing. As you assumed your respectable street garments, and trudged home to Betsy and the children and the Irish stew for dinner, the guns of a revolution were roaring, and Herrera was in full flight, and Paredes reigned in his stead — and where was Peña y Peña? Where that eminent diplomatist and dove of peace, Mr. John Slidell? He had arrived in Puebla on the eve of the dissolution; three times he presented his credentials, and was finally officially informed that the Mexican Government (that stable institution!) "could not admit him to the exercise of the functions conferred on him by the Government of the United States." With this Peña y Peña disappears, and history reveals his name no more. Herrera's administration was overthrown; in January, Paredes, a military chief, was ushered by the troops into the capital of Mexico, and a temporary government was formed with General Almonte, late minister to the United States, at its head — or among its heads. Mr. Slidell retreated to

Jalapa, whence he again attempted to obtain a hearing, and again received an unequivocal denial, this time from the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, Señor Costillo y Lanzas. On March 8, 1846, the advance column of the United States troops under Colonel Twiggs (the Second Regiment Dragoons) was in motion from Corpus Christi towards the Rio Grande; on the 18th the army reached the Arroyo Colorado; on the 21st Señor Costillo y Lanzas enclosed to Mr. Slidell his passports from the Mexican territories; on the 28th General Taylor mounted his batteries before Matamoros.

CHAPTER XXIII

The Girl I left behind Me

It took all this stirring news much longer to reach us than would appear from the summary; the editor of the *Journal* and scores of other editors had plenty of time for their placid prophesying. News from Texas was in the neighborhood of three weeks upon the road to us in the more distant States; and it was received with surprise, perhaps with a lurking dismay, in spite of the months, even years, of uneasiness and violence, of protest and recrimination and popular outcry, that had preceded it. We found it hard to credit. The mind involuntarily pictures a country upon the eve of war distracted with excitement, salvos firing, flags flaunting, churches crowded with weeping petitioners, artillery rattling through the streets, clamor of men and clangor of trumpets. Instead of all that here we were peacefully going about our business, reading the paper with a more lively interest perhaps, but tranquilly predicting that there would be no war almost up to the very last moment. In all our lives, young and old, none of us could remember the time when anybody could say with certainty what might be happening in the huge, dim, vacant West, so remote it was, unknown, unconquered, sprinkled with dots like Sahara in our maps and called the Great American Desert; there was always fighting there or somewhere; it was natural, whether with Indians or Mexicans; but war with ranked troops and cannon bellowing across the hills we were slow to accept. That spring the Scioto rose in its annual freshet, and swept away the rail-fences on its banks, and drowned a hog or two, and invaded the Bottoms; the red buds touched the gray woods with color; the orchards bloomed prettily; Mrs. Ducey gave Francie a party on her birthday and the house was wreathed with dogwood blossoms; Mr. James Sharpless was drawn on the grand jury, and served much against his will, but lacking a potent excuse; Mr. Nathan Burke

argued a case before the Court-in-Bank, and won it; and the *Journal* "learned from the *St. Louis Republican* that the following companies and officers of the 16th Regmt. U. S. Infantry were under marching orders for Texas and would leave as soon as possible: Lt. Col. Wilson, commanding Company K, Bt. Major Abercrombie, etc."

It may even very well be that the echoes of Resaca de la Palma had hardly died away, and the pursuit was still rolling backward to the Rio Grande, while Mr. Burke sat and listened to "The Battle of Prague," a pleasant evening in May, with the scent of the lilacs coming in at the windows of the little parlor. Mary's light dress made a soft bright blur by the piano; she had lilac ribbons to match — a spray of the fresh flowers in her black hair — ladies wore them in those days.

"You are so fond of martial music, aren't you, Mr. Burke?"

"I don't know much about any kind of music, you know," said the gentleman, with a laugh; "Jim and the doctor make fun of me. But I like to hear you play anything — you know that."

"I heard Dr. Vardaman was going to build a house for himself on that place he bought out by Governor Gwynne's, after all," Mary said, arranging the music. "Do you suppose he means to get married? Have you any idea who it is?"

"Married? Jack? Oh, that's a mistake — I don't think he has the least notion of such a thing. He has been talking about building. He says he means to have a regular man's house — he jokes a good deal about it, and Miss Clara is in quite a state for fear he won't let her have any closets."

"So you think it's nothing but gossip? I'm *very* sorry. I *hoped* it was true. He'd be so much happier with a wife, don't you think so? People said he'd been attentive to Jennie Hunter — but she's engaged to Horace Gwynne now. Jennie would have made a *lovely* doctor's wife. I'm so sorry. Shall I play something else, Mr. Burke? Here's Handel — 'Rinaldo' — 'I'll make war, and my foes I'll conquer!' You ought to like that. I believe you'd go and fight in Mexico, if you had the chance. You wouldn't care how people felt about — about seeing you go."

"Why, yes, I'd go — I'm just the kind that ought to go," said Nat, honestly; "there isn't anybody depending on me, or worrying about me, you know. My going wouldn't make any difference to a soul on earth. Men without ties are the very ones that ought to enlist."

"I — I don't think you ought to talk that way — it's not true — and it's not kind to — to your friends," said Mary, in a low voice. She looked at him, and away again hastily. Were there tears in her eyes? The next moment she began to finger the piano-keys in those little preparatory runs and trills that most players affect. "I'll play the 'Rinaldo.' Wouldn't you like to hear it? Will you turn, please?"

He got up and turned obediently; that is, he turned one leaf; and then, standing over her, and looking down at her face with the fair, almost pallid complexion, and features a little delicately sharpened this last year or so, forgot everything else until the abrupt cessation of the music made him start.

"What are you doing, idle man?" said Mary, lifting her gray eyes at him with an archly severe expression. "Why don't you turn? If you were one of my pupils, I would rap your knuckles. What are you thinking of?"

"I was thinking of you," said Nat.

She started up, her white skirts and ribbons rustling and fluttering, her eyes very wide and dark as they rested on the young man's face where, perhaps, she saw some unwonted or telltale expression; and put out one of her hands almost appealingly. But Burke took it in his own, and held it close.

"Mary —" he said.

And I think the gray-haired individual who writes this history will spare himself and everybody else a recital of what followed. He must be a strange sort of man who relishes witnessing another man's love-making. I have beheld upon the stage a thousand scenes of men and women sighing and vowing and kissing and protesting — I have waded through countless novels where the sentimentalizing monopolized two-thirds of one's time — and I swear I never did either without a profound embarrassment. I shrank guiltily from spying upon their confidences; I felt as if I

were listening and peeping at the keyhole. Are these things to be watched and exploited? We had better beware of meddling with all this sweet foolishness, else we shall destroy the sweetness and have nothing left but the folly. My grandson would no more care to read the tale of his grandfather's sweethearting than he would enjoy having the old gentleman pop in upon him and his Phyllis or Chloe at an interesting moment — from which maladroit action, Heaven defend us both! All that he needs or wants to know is that Mr. Burke went home along the star-lit streets, a little later than was his habit, very happy after his quiet fashion. He was too happy, in fact, to go to bed at once, and sat down to await the arrival of her brother Jim, in an arm-chair looking out upon the roofs and chimney-pots and stars. It was not a poetic vista, but Burke's thoughts were elsewhere; and no one knows what pictures of a home, a family, a long, bright, endless future Mrs. Slaney's shabby casement framed for him. He was still sitting thus when the city clocks struck twelve, and he heard at last Jim's foot on the stair; he came running up boyishly, two steps at a time, and whirled into the room. The walls shook as he banged the door, the flame of the lamp leaped upon the wick.

"Nat, have you heard it? Have you heard the news? No — I forgot! Of course you can't have heard. The letters just came into the office — I left 'em working like beavers at an extra —"

"Heard what? What under the sun has happened?" Burke asked, wondering.

"Why, it's come! War, I mean, *war*, Nathan B., *war!* We might have known we couldn't get out of it. Look here!" he snatched a roll of papers from his pockets and spread them crackling under the light. "I scratched off a copy. It's from the *Galveston News* — they've had fighting, Nat. Not bush-whacking around in corners, you know, but fighting. Look here, it's dated the thirtieth of last month, and this is May the what, do you know?"

"The eleventh — it's the eleventh," said Nat, himself excited.

"They'd had fighting down there where Taylor is already when this was written, and they must have had more since. Read that:—

LATEST NEWS

MEXICANS OPEN HOSTILITIES!!!

WAR NOW INEVITABLE!!!!

We learn that on the 24th inst. Gen'l Taylor ordered Capt. S. B. Thornton of the 2d dragoons with a detail of 61 men to make a reconnoissance at the crossing of the river (Bravo del Norte) above Ft. Brown. Accompanying Capt. Thornton were Capt. Hardee, Lieutenants Mason and Kane. According to the latest and most trustworthy reports at a point about thirty miles above the American camp, they were surprised by a large force of Mexicans, and after the loss of 16 men killed and wounded, compelled to surrender. The action took place in a plantation surrounded by a thick chaparral fence, the enemy out-numbering Thornton's command at least ten to one, it is stated. Lieutenant Mason fell mortally wounded at the first fire; it has been impossible so far to obtain definite details, but it is supposed that about ten or a dozen escaped, the Mexicans taking twenty-five or more prisoners, among them Thornton and Kane. We hope to publish a list of the killed, wounded, and missing within a few days. . . .

It had come, sure enough. "There's an end of all the blowing and coat-tail-dragging, and face-making, and you're-another-ing," said Jim; "only think, they may be hard at it, hammer-and-tongs this minute!"

"Shouldn't wonder. We ought to get a map, and find out where some of these places are," Burke said, studying the papers; "Bravo del Norte is just another name for the Rio Grande, I guess. But what on earth is *chaparral*, do you suppose?"

"Some kind of a thorny plant, cactus or something, I think. Are you going Nat? If they call for volunteers, I mean? You've always said you'd go."

Burke started. Was he going? Why, yes, of course — and yet — he hesitated, looking at his friend shyly, almost timidly. "Yes, I'll go — at least I ought to go, only — it's a little different now," he said, and swallowed uneasily, reddening.

"Hey, different?"

"I — I was going to tell you some — some news, too, Jim, only I — you began first with this — I —"

"What is it?" said Jim, unsuspectingly. He had drawn a chair to the table and was leaning over the despatches, with his head propped between his hands. "What did you say, Nat?"

"I'm going to — to be married."

Sharpless looked up abruptly; their eyes met in a brief silence. "Married?"

"Not at once, of course, I don't mean that — I — I'm not making quite enough for that yet, but I will in a year or so, I guess. I'm engaged, though," said Nat, blushing with a silly delight in the statement. "Can't you guess who it is?"

Jim's face paled strangely; he rose, leaning his weight on the table, braced upon his hands. The motion was like that of an old man; he cleared his throat. "I — I — it's Miss Blake, I suppose, Nat — of course, it's Miss Blake."

"Francie?" said Burke, in surprise and a faint disappointment; "why, no — what made you think of her? It's — I don't know why you don't know, Jim — I've never looked at any other girl — to be sure I never spoke of it to you, but I — I couldn't somehow — it's your sister — it's Mary."

There was another flat and somehow disconcerting silence. "*Mary!*" repeated Jim, vacantly; "my sister Mary?"

"Yes. Why do you look so?" said Nat, hurt. He scarcely knew what he had expected, but certainly not this. "Haven't you got anything to say to me, Jim? Aren't you — don't you like it? Aren't you a little glad?"

The other's face flushed all over; the tears came into his eyes. He kicked the chair noisily away from him and ran up to Burke and grasped his two hands. "Why, Nat, *glad!* Of course I'm glad. I was only taken aback for a minute. I'm such a dunce I never noticed it — never noticed anything, you know. But *glad!* Still, I couldn't care more for you even if you were my brother twice over, Nat, you know that!"

And the next day, Burke had his second interview with the Reverend Mr. Sharpless, which passed off not ill; and with Mrs. Sharpless, who was very kind, and called him her dear boy in a rather trembling voice, reaching up to pat his shoulder, being on the whole, as the young man remarked

inwardly with some perplexity, in an inexplicable way, more sweet and tender with him than Mary herself. The news of the engagement being spread abroad, various others came and shook hands with him impressively; and Jack Vardaman congratulated him heartily in a tone that left no possible doubt of his sincerity and disinterestedness; but, after all, there was comparatively little notice taken of the event, for, at the time, Nat's world had something else upon its mind.

However ignorant we may have been of the Mexican country and people when the news of Thornton's brush with the enemy reached us, there was no dearth of information and statistics afterwards. Maps were as plentiful as blackberries in August; they were published in every paper, sold in every shop, carried in every pocket; almost anybody could tell you offhand the exact location of Point Isabel (where our troops would probably be landed, in case —?); of Matamoros (twenty-seven miles southwest from Point Isabel); of Corpus Christi, whence the army had marched. George Ducey was especially strong on these figures and calculations, and knew precisely what General Taylor's next move ought to be. The *New Orleans Picayune* came out with a list, "which might be valuable for reference," of the area and population of all the states comprised in the Estados Unidos Mexicanos; it was widely copied, and the figures might have been alarming, if any of us had stopped to consider them; but we struggled awhile with the unfamiliar syllables — Guanaxuato — Coahuila — Tamaulipas — and cast them aside in impatience and contempt. All that we cared about was news direct and hot from the scene itself; there had been more fighting, there *must* have been more fighting, and how had we fared? We believed in our hearts that one American was equal to half a dozen Mexicans; nevertheless Taylor had only four thousand men — no, only twenty-five hundred — no — well, whatever it was, he had only a handful, whereas General Arista on the other side of the Rio Grande might draw on those entire Estados Unidos Mexicanos which lay, in a manner of speaking, at his elbow. We might have been in some uncertainty and apprehension, but that spirit surely inherited, however remotely and however diluted, from the Anglo-Saxon, that serene, confident, sanguine spirit of the dominant race, upheld us. It was in-

conceivable that a parcel of half-breed Spanish, Mexicans, Indians, what-not (thus we scornfully imagined them), with a general whom probably not one-third of them would obey, could beat and keep on beating United States soldiers under a man like old Zack Taylor, a seasoned officer, a veteran of 1812, the hero of a score of fights from Fort Harrison to the Everglades. "I do not feel much anxiety about Gen'l Taylor's position," wrote old General Felix Huston, from Port Huron; "I think he will lose more horses than men. I cannot think, with good generalship, the Mexicans can defeat him. I have not the highest opinion of the *material* of his army, but I will gamble on it they do not whip him. . . . The fact is, an American volunteer army, composed of clerks and loafers, mechanics and fiddlers, farmers and flatboat-men, backwoodsmen and city dandies, can fight any people on any ground; and from Daniel Boone down to the present time, they have beat Indians and Mexicans in all kinds of brush and logs, 'everglades' and 'chaparrals.' . . . Those d—d 'chaparrals' stick in my craw. As soon as I heard the regular army officers talking about 'chaparrals,' I thought, charge Uncle Sam with $40,000 for 'chaparrals'! It puts me in mind of *everglades* and *hummocks*. Every place where 300 baggage-wagons cannot get along has some d—d hard name."

This stout old warrior, sitting down to give vent to the above opinions with his unaccustomed pen, offers to Burke's mind a singularly humorous, spirited, and agreeable picture; and his letter somehow puts before one more vividly than any words of this historian the temper of our time. Beat them? Of course we should beat them! We could beat them with one hand tied behind us! But, in the meanwhile, what was happening? In a day or two, Taylor's letter, written three or four weeks back, calling on the governor of Louisiana for troops, was published; so that there could hardly be a doubt that some of the clerks, loafers, backwoodsmen, and dandies had had a chance to display their prowess before this. The general recommended General P. F. Smith to command these gentry; he subjoined a plan for the organization of the volunteer regiments. Fellow-citizens! To arms! "Texans, you have at last an opportunity of retaliating on these perfidious Mexicans the many injuries they have done

you — !" There was renewed and very great activity amongst our militia bodies. The Montgomery Guards, the German military companies, drilled feverishly; Captain Burke's command made brilliant progress; Lieutenant Ducey stalked around breathing out fire and slaughter. I should not have liked to be the Mexican to come within reach of George's doughty arm; he would have had to get briskly about his heathenish Mexican prayers. It was a Monday morning that Mr. Burke, not having seen the paper as yet, was stepping along towards his office when at the corner of State and High streets he encountered a crowd so numerous and unusual for that comparatively early hour that he paused to reconnoitre it — reconnoitre being the word that sprang spontaneously before his mind and made him smile. "We're getting very military," he thought, and pushed up to a place whence he could see that the cause of detention was not two men fighting or one man having a fit, but a bill already posted high up. The artist who had accomplished this work was departing with his ladder and paste-pail and brushes, and a roll of similar bills under his arm. "Going to enlist, Sam?" some one sung out, waving an arm at an acquaintance over the hats and shoulders. "You bet!" Burke raised on tiptoe and craned his neck to read: —

"Whereas, the Congress of the United States by virtue of the Constitutional Authority vested in them have declared . . . that by the act of the Republic of Mexico, a state of war exists between that government and the United States. Now, therefore, I, James K. Polk, President of the United States, do hereby proclaim the same . . . enjoin all persons holding civil or military authority . . . to be vigilant and zealous . . ."

Burke walked away meditatively, and found the *Journal* at his door with a wailing editorial on the *general war* in which the President had unwarrantably involved the country. "But the *mischief* is *done* now. Let nothing prevent the Whigs from doing their whole duty in the defence of the country — it is enough that our flag is in danger —" the article continued in that mood of pious resignation which a paper of good Whig principles must adopt — and blithely went to discussing the probable size of Ohio's quota of troops in the next column! In another day we had news of the bom-

bardment and fall of Matamoros, and of the victories of Palo Alto and Resaca; and Governor Bartley issued his call for volunteers.

Nat Burke was one of the first to respond to that invitation. The young man was not by nature impulsive; he had his reckless and visionary moments, but a sober second thought generally corrected them. And when he went and enrolled himself and took the oath before the United States Army officers who were in charge of the enlistments, it was with no brilliant images of glory and valor and renown; he thought he was performing a natural, proper, and dutiful act, for the simple reasons he had given his betrothed. It was no surrender of his legal career, which he meant to resume upon his return. And if he did not return — but you and I know that it is always the other fellow who is going to be killed. I do not remember that Burke ever gave any more consideration to that possibility during his military experience than he did at any other time of his life. Who, aside from misanthropes and hypochondriacs, ever deliberately sits down to contemplate his death and fading hours? Why, nobody, not even those warily devout people who are forever preaching these things at us! Mr. Burke made arrangements with his friend Lewis to take over his business and went about his preparations with a kind of placid zest. For one instant, as we have seen, he hesitated, thinking of Mary, but it was only for an instant. And, to tell the truth, the young lady herself received the announcement of his resolution with comparative calm — which, inconsistently enough, Burke a little resented. If Mary had burst into tears and flung herself into his arms, he would have felt a little foolish, yet still been obscurely pleased. The most modest and least self-assertive of men likes to be a hero to his womenkind — yes, even when he laughs at their absurd unwarranted admiration, he is secretly tickled. But Mary gave way to no such hysterical demonstrations; Burke was struck, as he had been once or twice before in his life, with the extraordinary difference in women, whom we serenely assume to be all of one pattern. Little Francie Blake had hung on his neck with wild tears when he was only going away a step. Of course she was nothing but a child, and she would not do such a thing now; but she might exhibit quite as much

emotion over his departure as the girl he was engaged to, without indecorum. Mary was almost as much elated and excited as the young fellows who were enlisting right and left in these few weeks.

"I wish I could go, too — if I were a man, I *would* go," she said with brilliant eyes. "I believe I'll cut off my hair and go as — as a First Musician. I could get that position I know — couldn't I? They're paid fifteen dollars a month — I saw it in the paper — two of 'em to every regiment. I'll enlist with yours, Nathan. The musicians wear red coats with white linings and turnbacks, and a white worsted plume in their caps. Don't you think that would be becoming to me, sir? Don't you think I'd make a fine figure of a soldier?" She paraded up and down the room with an erect and martial carriage, blowing on an imaginary trumpet, and casting provoking side-glances at him, until Burke caught and kissed her on her pretty mouth conveniently puckered for the trumpet-blowing. The young gentleman had gone a good way from his original post of tremulous suppliant, it will be observed. I do not think Mary encouraged him; she submitted to his caresses without any vulgar scuffling, yet without returning them. And if Burke felt vaguely that a little more warmth in her smile or eyes would have somehow seemed more natural or gratifying, he yet admired her very coolness and self-command. He liked her the better for it, he told himself; and, at any rate, he was the only man she had ever cared for — she said so. And no one had ever kissed her before — no!

The declaration of war and subsequent action of Congress in voting men and means occasioned no flurry on the New York Stock Exchange — so Burke heard from old Mr. Marsh — yet the excitement all over the country was now blazing high. All kinds of rumors spread from the seat of war. Arista was retreating with his forces cut to pieces; Arista was a prisoner, with General La Vega and their families, and they were already on their way to New Orleans; Santa Anna had been put in command and was advancing; Taylor was fortified at Matamoros; Taylor had gone to Saltillo with the army. Private letters from officers who had been in the fight at Palo Alto began to pour in; Burke heard many such read aloud by somebody standing on a chair

above the crowd in the bar-room, or coffee-house. ". . . Their dinners were on the fire, cooking, and answered for ours. . . ." ". . . Our battalion followed at a run in pursuit six miles to the ferry. . . ." "The Mexican muskets were all marked George IV or Rex, Tower — "

"Good Gracious!" ejaculates Nat, thinking of his own respectable heirloom hanging over the chimney-piece at Mrs. Slaney's.

"Poor Ringgold was buried to-day with all the honors of war. It's a dreadful loss to the service. The wound was in the groin; when he fell he called out, 'Never mind me, boys! Go ahead!' . . . "The general behaved most gallantly. In the second battle he was more exposed than any one else; and there he sat part of the time giving his orders with his leg cocked over the pommel of the saddle. . . ." The reader has to stop for the cheering. Hurrah for old Rough-and-Ready! Three times three!

The enlistments were so heavy at all the various points in our State that before long it became a matter of great anxiety amongst all these brave lads as to who was to be allowed to go. Ohio was called upon for only three regiments; and though that would amount to nearly three thousand men, it was evident the applicants would exceed that number. Somebody would have to stay at home — distracting thought! The war would be over in a few months, weeks perhaps — it might be over now, for that matter — and the one chance of the century would be lost! Of course, the militiaman, having, presumably, already had some practice in drill and the handling of weapons, would be preferred to the detached youth with a taste for adventure and no experience. To be sure he could enlist in the United States Army for the regular term of years; but, generally speaking, he didn't want to do that. If he happened to be or think himself a gentleman, he naturally would choose the volunteer service and a chance by some wire-pulling to get himself an officer's commission, rather than serve his country as a plain private. From this arose dire worry; yet Burke held on his way undisturbed in a certainty that it would not fall to his lot to be among the siftings. The process, by the way, appeared to go neither by justice nor by favor nor anything but blind luck. Two men were desirous of working in the field;

the one was taken and the other left, nobody knew why, least of all, apparently, those who made the selection. The German companies were declined on account of the inability of the rank and file to understand English — a great mistake, to Burke's notion. They would have learned soon enough, and were the very stuff for soldiers, — sturdy, patriotic, and with an instinctive appreciation of the value of discipline and massed strength. Nat was not disappointed; he and his company, and Captain Walworth with his, and the Montgomery Guards in a body were drafted into the First Ohio very shortly after their arrival at Camp Washington, outside of Cincinnati, where the volunteers from all over the State had their rendezvous; Mitchell was their colonel, a West Point man.

But before that momentous event took place, we had six weeks of frenzied preparation. Nothing further appeared to be happening on the Rio Grande, but the popular fever did not abate. Biographies of Taylor, of Scott, — who was at this time in Washington, doing a great deal of talking and writing, — of Kearny and Doniphan, of Brown, who had so gallantly defended his poor little fort (a successor, but victorious, to Crockett. Hurrah! Remember the Alamo!), of Ringgold and Thornton, came out at least once a week in the papers. Generals Wool and Worth passed through on their way to their commands. A Colonel Croghan was appointed inspector-general of the volunteer troops. "Croghan? That must be 'little Georgie's' son," said Burke to himself. There were yard-long lists of the presidential commissions issued every day; exact and most prolix instructions as to the organization and equipment of the regiments. If we were privates, we were to get forty rounds of ammunition and two flints apiece served out to us at the United States Army depot at Baton Rouge, when we passed there on our way to New Orleans and the Gulf. If officers, like our friends Captain Burke and Lieutenant Ducey, we were to wear a dark blue cloth coat with two rows of silver or plated buttons (minutely described), with a standing collar, a plain round cuff, 2 loops 4½ inches long on each side of the collar-opening, etc. We had to have winter trousers of light-blue mixture cloth and summer ditto of white linen or cotton. A black beaver cap 7½ inches high with a patent-leather band and

peak was prescribed for our heads; we were allowed our choice of a black leather or silk stock, and of ankle or "Jefferson" style boots. George Ducey could have recited all these details in his sleep; if getting ready could make a soldier of a man, George would have been the best that ever went in shoes — ankle or Jefferson! I am sure there was not in our whole regiment, State, or army a better-dressed or more dashing volunteer, or a more ferocious enemy of Mexico. He let his mustache grow, and presented so fierce and warlike an appearance in our streets that he was noticeable even in this excited time. Mrs. Ducey, without a doubt, spent her days in planning impossible comforts for his kit, and her nights in weeping over the dark future. I fear nobody else viewed George's departure with a very keen regret; he was not popular even in that fashionable circle of which he was so distinguished an ornament, and if people respected the spirit he displayed in enlisting, they none the less wondered at it in George Ducey. It was natural enough that he should have joined the militia and decked himself with epaulets and flourished a sword in the late piping times of peace; but Burke, remembering certain not altogether heroic scenes in which George had borne a leading part, was privately a good deal amused and scornful. "He thinks he'll come back a brigadier-general at the very least," Nat said to Sharpless, laughing; "it takes much hardtack and cold bacon and sore feet and sleeping in the open — to say nothing of a few other desirable qualifications — to make a brigadier-general, I guess. And somehow I don't see George on the march and in the camp any more than I see him on the pitched field for that matter. But he's a curious mixture — you never can tell."

"Huh!" Jim grunted. He disdained to canvass George's prospects; but remarked after a moment's silence: "You talk like an old stager, Nat. Anybody might think you'd made a dozen campaigns."

"I think it's born in me," Burke said. "It's not so much that I used to camp out and follow the trail so often with Darnell when I was a boy, and listen to his wild old stories — it's not that, though that must have something to do with it. It's something else — it's in the blood, I think. There's an old battered ex-army-sergeant — that is, he *says* he was

a sergeant — in our quartermaster's department that I watched for a while the other day, trying to show one of the men how to pack a mule — the man boggling along with everything sliding all over, camp-kettle one way, coffee-mill the other, in a terrible mess — mule backing and sidling — sergeant swearing fit to raise your hair! I went out and roped the whole business up tolerably shipshape in a minute or two. I don't know that it would have stayed very long on the march, but the sergeant was tremendously complimentary. 'You've seen service before, sir, I reckon,' says he, I've been used to horses and harness since I was a little tad, you know — I'm kind of handy with 'em. Perhaps I've got a long string of barbarous ancestors, trappers, hunters, rough-and-ready soldiers — God He knows who or what they were. If the governor doesn't take us, I'll enlist with some body of riflemen in the regular service. I shoot better with a rifle than with this pistol we have to carry. But I think probably we'll be taken."

It was a warm June night, the night before we marched, when Mr. — mercy, I beg his pardon! — when *Captain* Burke delivered himself of these beliefs, sitting with his friend, and smoking a last pipe together in their room, one on either side of the window with their heels on the sill. Nat's portmanteau had already gone forward with the company luggage; there on a chair lay his uniform neatly folded, his sword stood in the corner. The day before, gallantly arrayed, he and the seventy-odd men of his command had marched out to the Ducey home; and there before the front porch, where the customary summer crop of young ladies bloomed in pretty organdies and swisses, drawn up at "parade rest," with their captain in the van, a brave show of blue coats and white trousers (linen or cotton), they had received a beautiful flag embroidered and bullion-fringed, presented by the Ladies' Aid Society of Trinity Church through Miss Frances Blake. Francie could hardly hold upright the big staff with its weight of drooping banner; she was very much agitated, spoke in a low, tremulous voice, and may have forgot the most of her speech, for all that Burke heard of it was the single sentence: "Captain, in consideration of your distinguished valor and patriotism, we present you this flag," with which the emblem was handed

over to him. The valorous and patriotic captain himself was somewhat confused, and the few words he managed to stammer out bore no slightest resemblance either to what he had meant to say, or to the magnificently appropriate sentiment credited to him by the morning paper: "So long as life nerved his arm, or his heart beat high with hope, that flag should never be disgraced!" You may see it this moment, rolled up and ticketed with a score of others behind glass doors in the collection at the State House. After the solemnity was over, we broke ranks, and officers and men "partook of an elegant collation," served by the flounced and ribboned regiment themselves; there were lemonade and rich cakes and coffee and jellies and frozen creams, and a great deal of hospitality and brave smiling, and, I dare say, some aching hearts. When Jim said that Miss Blake looked like an angel, Burke acquiesced heartily if a little absently; he was thinking of his own angel, who had been there, too, wearing a garnet brooch and ear-rings which the young fellow had given her, and looking very fresh and sprightly in spite of the anxiety she must have felt for him. Mary was braver than most women, he thought; she had a spirit like that of Rebecca in "Ivanhoe." Nevertheless, he liked to think that she had shed a few tears against his gilt buttons when he had held her tight at their final parting an hour ago — but had she? She had stoutly told him she was resolved not to be foolish. Mrs. Sharpless, on the other hand, who was fond of him, and of a firm will too, had broken down and sniffed and sobbed. And now, as they sat together, Jim broke a long silence by saying with something of an effort: —

"I suppose, Nat, if I were a Christian, I should say, 'God bless you!'"

"The wish is the same — no difference what words you say it in, it seems to me," said Burke.

And they sat for another long while in silence, each thinking, no doubt, that all our belief, and all our religion, and all our hope of immortality comes to no more than this in the end: "Oh, remember me a little when the grass is green over me! Think of me sometimes kindly!"

The next day our volunteers marched. It was early, but the town turned out to see them go, and the sidewalks were

packed and there was vigorous cheering. The sun winked on the window-panes, where all the green-painted shutters were flung back, and many heads thrust forth; there were more ribbons and white skirts on the balconies and porches; the little old-fashioned hundred-leaf roses were in multitudinous bloom above the white palings. Market-wagons and drovers pulled up at the crossings as the troops marched by; the maids hanging out clothes in the yards or scrubbing steps dropped everything and ran to the street. Children tumbled out of bed with their frowzy heads and small night-dresses; people jumped up from the breakfast table and left the coffee-pot cooling. Here they come! Rub-a-dub-dub, the drum — and likewise tweedle-eedle-eedle, the fife! "The Girl I Left Behind Me!" There is a kind of heart-breaking gayety about this old tune. Here they come, very fresh, natty, and jaunty, very young, strong, and light-hearted, very confident of fame, honors, rewards, and — the girl I left behind me! Rub-a-dub-dub — tweedle-eedle — ee! That stout youngster in the front rank with his flushed face, his eager eyes, with all his visions of war and conquest, Arabian Nights palaces, *señoritas Mejicanas,* perhaps — dear me, why not? We didn't all leave girls behind us! — that boy died of a sunstroke the day after we landed. I have forgot his name; we buried him there in the sand at Brazos Santiago, and the sea is very loud above his grave. That other young fellow with the ploughman walk, carrying our new flag so proudly with his white cotton gloves wrinkling off his finger-ends, and the perspiration glimmering in all the creases of his honest sunburnt neck — he got a shot in the throat and fell just in front of me that time we charged the Tenería; he came from my part of the country, some relation of old Pascoe, I think. Hurrah, hurrah! Good-by, Jack; good-by, Jill! It's forty years since you parted, may you rest well! Old Nat Burke will go and smoke a pipe in the chimney-corner; and having seen War, will thank his God for Peace.

One young person rose early with the rest of the world that morning; but, evading the others of her family, ran away and reached a corner where she posted herself at the top of a flight of steps, alongside a worthy Irish body who had just been engaged with a pail and broom in sluicing them

down. "It's lookin' f'r y'r swatehearrt ye'll be afther?" she said sympathetically; "well, it's nayther chick n'r child I've got among thim poor byes, but I feel sorry f'r thim just th' same," and indeed she wept profusely and adjured the Virgin as they came by. The young person said nothing; her eyes ached as she scanned the lines — the Montgomery Guards — the Harrison Grays — Captain Walworth on horseback — Captain Burke marching at the head of his men. He did not look around; he did not see her; and presently the sound of the music died away.

PART II

CHAPTER I

The Mail-Bag

The Hon'ble Samuel Gwynne to
Messrs. Wylie & Slemm,
Cincinnati, Ohio.

July 15, 1846

Messrs. Wylie & Slemm,

Gentlemen:

Your letter of the 13th. inst. has been rec'd. In reply I beg to state that I have known a Mr. Nathan Burke of this city for some years, and while I am not acquainted with the place or circumstances of his birth, or the names of his parents, I believe him to be the young man about whom you inquire, as there is no other Nathan Burke to my knowledge in our city.

Mr. Burke is now, I should judge, about twenty-five years of age — which corresponds with your conjecture — and has probably lived here upwards of ten years, being engaged for the last four in the practice of Law. Previous to that — as you correctly state — he studied for a year or more in my office, which I may say without undue complacency, has always been open to honest and ambitious talent, however poor or modest its externals. Mr. Burke appeared to me to possess in a marked degree, prudence, integrity and good sense; he bears the best of reputations in our community. Although unable to furnish them myself, I do not doubt that the details of his earlier years will be easily discoverable; your sources of information seem to be unusually reliable, and the young man's whole life, I am confident, has been passed in this section of the country.

Respectfully,

(copy)

Archer Lewis, Esq., to
Captain N. Burke
First Regmt. O. V. I.
Point Isabel, Mexico. July 15, '46

DEAR BURKE,

The enclosed letter[1] came into the office this morning; and though it is marked *private* I opened it according to our agreement. I hadn't gone very far, of course, before I saw that it was of a strictly personal nature; and not knowing exactly how important it might be to you, took a copy for safety and future reference, and am now forwarding the original. Also wrote Messrs Wylie & Slemm explaining your whereabouts, and that I myself couldn't give them any reliable information, beyond the fact that your mother's maiden-name was certainly Mary Granger, as they themselves seem to know already; and wound up by referring them to Pascoe and Williams as the only people I knew of who would be likely to remember your family or could speak with any sort of authority about your mother and father. Afterwards up at the Court-House this afternoon, I met McCormick and Townley whom you recall — they are both up here on cases — and another Cincinnati man named Hammond, editor of the "Gazette," I think, and put a few inquiries about the firm of Wylie & Slemm, thinking they were all men actively engaged in business and likely to know everybody; but none of them knew anything about W. & S. It's funny, if they had been a month or so more forehanded with their questions they might have caught you at Camp Washington when you were there with the troops. They seem to be rather mysterious and secretive, judging from the tone of their letter. If you find you're the long-lost heir to the earldom, like the fellows in Scott, don't get shot without making your will first and remembering your humble friends and business associates.

All well and everything as usual in the old town. I saw Her on the street the other day, but only to bow to; she looked all right.

Faithfully yours,

A. B. LEWIS.

[1] Neither the original letter nor copy could be found; they were probably destroyed. — M. S. W.

James Sharpless, Esq., to
Captain N. Burke July 20, 1846.

DEAR NAT,

Your last letter dated at New Orleans the fifth finally arrived, looking footsore and weary a couple of days ago; and Miss F. B. to whom I showed it that very evening, remarked tremulously that, Thank Heaven, he wasn't shot yet! which, considering that you haven't been exposed so far to any fire more dangerous than that of your own pistol with which you are esteemed a pretty handy man, seemed to me touching but uncalled-for. Still, it's a very pleasant thing, Nathan, to think that some woman is anxious and glad and relieved about you — heigh-ho! A very pleasant thing indeed! You'll make war and your foes you'll conquer, vengeance for your wrongs obtaining — like our friend *Rinaldo;* and then you will come home and Mary will crown you with laurels, and how grand will be your mien, N. Burke, with a crown of greenery perched above your long nose! Just now, however, the chances for acquiring wounds and glory in Mexico seem to be growing slimmer every day; Taylor is motionless on the Rio Grande, we hear; Scott, whose pen is so much mightier than his sword, continues to fulminate at Washington; and people up here are beginning to grumble that both generals are sacrificing a Mexican in the hand, so to speak, for a Presidency in the bush — a great injustice, most probably, to each man, but the public must have its say. What's a democratic form of government for unless you can abuse those in authority? Aren't we *paying* our army and our generals? Well, then, we're going to say what we d—n please about 'em! Cock-a-doodle-doo-oo — oo! Although we are all master-tacticians nowadays, capable of telling Taylor exactly what to do in these present and any other circumstances, still I have a kind of lurking suspicion that the old man knows his trade, and has good reasons for his inaction; I think he is the last man in the world to neglect his business for politics. And as for Scott he cannot help writing copiously any more than he can help breathing, and that unfortunate "plate of soup" has dished his chances for the Presidency anyhow. What on earth possessed him? The fellow has no sense of humor; he may "step out of the office for a hasty plate of soup" at dinner-time as often as

he chooses, but he ought not to leave that information in a note lying on his desk; he might know if the newspapers ever got hold of it the country would never get through laughing at it. You hear nothing now but "hasty plates" of hash, "hasty plates" of pork-and-beans, "hasty plates" of apple-pie, "hasty plates" of everything under the sun. It's astonishing that a man of real ability and a proved soldier should show himself once in a while such a self-important donkey. And after all the rumpus there may be no more fighting, and Taylor will come home bringing his Palo-Alto sheaves with him, and run for the Presidency on either ticket, as they say he is perfectly willing to do; and the gallant First Ohios may be disbanded without striking a lick; and Captain Burke may have to beat his sword into a ploughshare — alas! And everything will go on the same jog-trot as before.

No, not quite the same, for something rather out-of-the way has just come to pass, and there may be a sequel to it. As I sat here the other day, muddling over a translation of "Persicos odi," and against my own will twisting the verse into all manner of grotesqueries after the style of Hosea Bigelow —

> "Ez fer Persians — wa'al, I never
> Took much stock in 'em, my son.
> Foolin' round with wreaths forever,
> When they'd orter git th' chores done!
>
> Whut *I* say is: let th' roses
> Go — they cost a sight o' money.
> Wear yer old blue jeans — them cloze is
> Sootable, ef they ain't toney —"

As I sat meditating these brilliant lines, I say, there came a coughing and shuffling at the door, and presently a hesitating knock, on top of which and in response to my invitation there walked in a gentleman dressed, sure enough, in jeans, pantaloons tucked into the tops of his rather massive boots, a plaid velveteen waistcoat with gilt buttons, a bottle-green cloth coat creased a dozen ways like a folding-map, a black satin neck-scarf sprinkled with spots about the size and color of so many rings of hard-boiled egg, encircling a shirt-collar

wilted to a string; and, finally, a buckeye hat. Do you recognize the wearer of this costume? You ought to. That I did not at first is, after all, not very surprising, as I have only seen him once or twice in my whole life, and never in such a glory of Sunday clothes.

"Mister Sharples," said the apparition, pronouncing my name thus — as a good many do, for that matter — and then, seeing, doubtless, that I was quite at a loss, he explained: "My name's Williams — 'Liph. I guess you've heerd Nat Burke talk 'bout me — you're one of his best friends, ain't you?"

"Oh — why — of course — take a seat, Mr. Williams, take a seat. Er — um — you know, I suppose, that Burke's not here — he's gone to Mexico with the army — of course you knew that," said I, in some confusion, and wondering mightily what Mr. Williams' errand with me could possibly be. For he had the air of having something to communicate; and, indeed, he began at once, very simply and directly, and not without a slight look of worry.

"Mister Sharples, I jest thort, bein' 's I was to town anyway [I am repeating his own words as nearly as I can remember] I jest thort I'd drop erround to see you 'bout somethin' thet come up th' other day — somethin' 'bout Nat. I went over to Mister Lewises, but he wa'n't at th' office, 'n' I ain't got time to wait. I dunno ez you er any uv Nat's friends in th' city knows — mebbe you've heerd already — but they's some lawyer fellers — at least to say they's *one* lawyer-feller — come up from Cincinnati, 'n' they're rakin' th' kentry with a fine-tooth-comb fer to fin' Nat, er his fambly, er somebody that knows somethin' 'bout 'em. Name uv Slemm, kinder tall man with a leetle cast in one eye, 'n' a big seal-ring. Hez he ben here? Cuz ef he *has*, why, o' course, you know all about it anyway."

I told him no, that I had not met nor heard of any such person inquiring about you, whereat he wagged his head sagely, not ill-pleased, I think, to be the purveyor of this interesting news, albeit his good-hearted anxiety about you. "Wa'al," he said, ruminating, "mebbe he ain't got erround to you yet, er *mebbe* he ain't figurin' on seein' you at all, 's long 's you can't know much of anythin' 'bout Nat's folks anyhow. Fact is, ye see, Nat ain't *got* any folks to mention.

'N' you've only knowed him sence he settled in town. But he said right out — this here feller, this Slemm did, I mean — thet he'd wrote to Mister Lewis, 'n' Mister Lewis had *re*ferred him to me. That's how-come he come to see me. Don't ye chaw, Mr. Sharples? I got a plug here 't' I'd be glad fer ye to take of."

I don't chaw and so declined; whereupon 'Liph, feeling evidently that he had conformed to all the conventions, whittled off a comforting hunk, and got it into his mouth before he answered my question.

"You say this Mr. Slemm went out to see you at the farm, to ask about Nathan?"

He nodded. "Druv out in a liv'ry buggy 'n' horse he'd hired right down here at th' corner," he said circumstantially. "Kinder dressed-up, slick-talking feller, y'know, Mister Sharples — I dunno, uv course, mebbe he's all right, but he pretty nigh asked too many questions fer *me*. I don't mind folks bein' cur'us, but not so all-fired cur'us ez he was. Ye see —" and here he assumed an expression of profound shrewdness and worldly wisdom — "seems like, fer all he was so close-mouthed — 'bout everythin' but his questions, thet is — we got th' idee, her 'n' I did —"

"Her?" said I, stupidly enough.

"Yes, her — my wife, y'know," he explained, staring a little. "We got th' idee thet they was somethin' 'bout proputty mixed up in it — somethin' thet Nat's father's er mother's folks might uv owned, er mebbe didn't *own*, but jest *took*, like they sometimes did long back in th' early times, y'know, 'n' mebbe somebody's goin' ter come on Nat fer it, someway er other 'n' jest regularly law th' poor young feller out uv his boots. I've heerd uv things like that happenin' — law's tricky, ye know," he waved a vague comprehensive gesture. "'N' I sorter think somebody had orter let Nat know — f'r instance you could write to him, couldn't you? You know where to write to, so'd he'd be sure to git it."

"Why, certainly, Mr. Williams," said I. "But I really don't think it's necessary. If these people have already applied to Mr. Lewis, who is a lawyer himself, and in charge of Burke's affairs, it seems to me everything must be all right. Lewis would hardly have sent them to you or been willing to help them at all otherwise."

"Wa'l, he's jest a young feller same ez Nat is — same ez *you* air — 'n' more 'n likely he don't suspicion what they're up to," said 'Liph — and I saw his features settling into that look of immovable, iron-bound, rock-riveted distrust which seems peculiar to honest slow wits; it was plain to me something or somebody must have made a very unfavorable or disturbing impression on Mr. Williams. "Whatever 'tis, I don't want ter stick in, 'n' mebbe make trouble fer Nat. He'd ought ter to be wrote to right off —"

"Well, but he *has* been told, ten to one," I urged. "If all this is of any importance, Lewis has undoubtedly written him already; and you and I know that Nathan is pretty well able to take care of himself. Now I don't think you need to worry, Mr. Williams —"

He went steadily on, as if I hadn't said a word! "Nat had ought to be wrote to right off" he said firmly and judicially, "I ain't very handy writin' myself, 'n' I dunno ez I c'ld git it all down first 'n' last, so's he c'ld make it out. I want Nat ter know that me nor Lindy hadn't any notion uv blabbin' erround 'bout him 'n' his folks, 'n' th' minute we made out what Slemm was after, we shet right up, 'n' he never got another thing out'n ary one or other uv us. But they was one thing happened I'm sorry fer — dretful sorry — only it couldn't 'a' ben helped hardly. Ye see this Slemm feller comin' up in his buggy with all th' style he put on, 'n' th' dogs a-runnin' out 'n' yoppin' the way dogs does, 'n' him steppin' erround so grand 'n' flourishin' off his hat, 'n' then settin' down 'n' squarin' himself off, 'n' beginnin' with his string uv questions, why, he got ev'body erround th' place kinder worked up. 'N' they was three-four uv th' childern hangin' erround like childern will, ter watch him, 'n' they made a kinder racket 'n' upsettin' in th' house, 'n th' first thing you know they'd got Maw waked up. She's goin' on ninety years old, ye know, Mr. Sharples, 'n' she kin see pretty good still, but she's feeble, 'n' next-door to stone-deef. Why, ord'nar'ly you might fire off a cannon right beside her, 'n' she wouldn't even turn her head; she'll sleep right through the almightiest ragin' thunder-storm you ever see, jest ez ca'm ez a baby! 'N' here she went 'n' waked up with jest a leetle bit uv noise like she's ben used to ev'ry day uv her life! I dunno why it is old people air so everlastin' pernicketty.

Hey? No, she ain't my mother — she's her mother. Her name's Darce. She'd ben settin' in her big chair kinder all humped up, 'n' not payin' no 'tention, same ez she always is, when Slemm he come in, 'n' she never even looked up, at first. But ez I was sayin' when she *did* wake up, she sorter beckoned to Mary Ann thet she always unnerstan's better'n anybody else, somehow, 'n' sez, 'What is it? What did yer paw say?' 'He's talkin' ter th' strange man, Gram'maw!' sez little Mary Ann, a-yellin' — ye got ter yell to make her hear, y'know. 'What strange man? What's his name?' 'I don't guess he's got any name — he didn't say,' sez Mary Anne, jest like a child. 'N' thet made Slemm laugh. 'Wa'al, what's he want anyhow?' sez Maw, jest pre-bent 'n' determined like old people git oncet in a while, on findin' out all 'bout everythin' thet's goin' on, 'n' havin' a finger in th' pie; seems like they jest nachelly can't bear to set back 'n' give up. 'I dunno what he wants,' sez Mary Anne, kinder frightened, with th' strange man lookin' at her, 'n' everybody listenin', 'n' her maw makin' a face at her to quit 'n' keep quiet. 'I dunno' sez pore little Mary Ann, ready to cry. 'He's askin' 'bout somebody — somebody named Nathan, I dunno who it is.' Ye see, Mary Ann, she ain't hardly ever seen Nat; she was borned after he went away. 'Nathan who? Nathan Granger? Tell him he's dead — leastways I mind somebody sayin' he was dead. He must be old 'nuff ter die anyhow. I ain't seen him in years. We come over th' mountains tergether 'long back, 'n' I ain't seen him sence —' '*What!*' sez Slemm jest like that. '*What!*' sez he, '*Nathan Granger!*' 'N' he moved over 'n' set down 'longside uv Maw. 'This is very interestin',' sez he in thet slick way he has. 'You say you come over th' Alleghenies with other pioneers, ma'am —' 'Fer th' Lord's sake, mister' sez I, 'don't git th' old woman started — not on thet mountain-trip anyhow. It'll rip th' throat out uv ye to talk to her, 'n' she don't know nothin' but ol' times, anyhow. She fergits what happened this week mebbe, 'n' she'll talk to ye by th' hour 'bout things thet happened fifty years ago when she was young.' He looked real pleased! 'Ye don't say!' sez he, kinder smilin'. 'Well, now, thet's jest what I'd like first-rate to hear about,' sez he sorter settlin' down. 'N', Mr. Sharples, durned ef he didn't set there 'n' holler at

Maw fer close on to two hours! I'll bet th' pore old woman ain't had sech a good time sence she useter be right spry an' go erround ter lay folks out 'n' funerals 'n' sech.'"

He went on to say that by this dauntless pertinacity, Mr. Slemm — for whom I began to have some sympathy in his task! — finally got out of old Mrs. Darce all she could remember about Nathan Granger. They had met in the early days of emigration to these settlements; they didn't come from the same place. Her folks was Connecticut; she didn't know where Granger hailed from, except that it was up No'th somewheres, up to Canady. She heard once long back a good while thet Granger he'd died of th' fever down to Muskingum County; she c'ld hev' asked his darter 'bout it, but somehow she never thort to. They wan't any Grangers left erroun' anywheres thet she knew of. Yes, oh yes, Nathan Granger he hed childern — she couldn't jest say how many, er whether they was boys or girls, er what became of 'em. All excep' that pore little Mary Granger, her that married John Burke, that is. John Burke he come an' settled right here on th' Scioty, and his wife she died inside th' year, when th' baby was born. It was awful cold bein' th' first o' th' year, 'n' 'peared like she was jest clean tuckered out, 'n' couldn't nachelly stand any more; she died day er two after the baby come. Mrs. Darce helped nurse her and laid her out. She wanted th' baby sh'ld be named Nathan, so they done it. Then John Burke he died — he got drownded giggin' fer fish through th' ice that winter they hed th' big freeze.

It was at this point that the indefatigable Slemm, man of many devices, led the conversation back to the original topic by inquiring if Granger had any means — owned property hereabouts, for instance — which seems to have been one of the questions that somehow aroused 'Liph's suspicions. However, the results were rather meagre. Mrs. Darce remembered hearing him or somebody else say that th' Gov'ment had give him land somewheres — mebbe 'twas in Franklin County — she couldn't say. 'Twan't up in th' Western Reserve, though — she appears to have been very decided about that — 'cuz he hadn't fit in th' Revolution, or if he had, 'twan't fer th' States, 'twas fer th' Britishers. 'Twas only them that fit fer th' States that got th' land give

'em up in th' Reserve, yeh know. No, she didn't know where he meant to settle — didn't know nothin' 'bout Granger's business. She never was no great hand to ask questions— some folks was, but *she* wan't ever. She remembered Granger pertickler becuz although he was a young man, not more'n forty — ("Forty seems mighty young to *her*, ye know, mister," said 'Liph apologetically)— his hair was gittin' white all over. Also he was a turrible good shot with a rifle — she never seen anybody thet c'ld shoot ekal to Granger 'less'n it was Jake Darnell. Might ask *him*, ef yeh wanted to know 'bout Granger er Burke — he knew 'em both. Oh, yes, she'd plumb fergot Jake was dead — she fergot, times. "Lindy, where's my pipe?" "Maw, she got real peevish 'n' tired out herself, 'fore he got done with her," 'Liph remarked.

And so down goes the curtain on old Mrs. Darce and the inquiry. This was what Williams was so painfully anxious for you to know, and I undertook to write you the entire story. I pointed out, to quiet him, that Slemm might have exactly the opposite object from what 'Liph suspected — that he might be trying to establish some claim to an estate, or to get a what-d'ye-call-'em? — an instrument to quiet a title. But 'Liph shook his head gloomily — and, frankly, it seems to me his distrust of Slemm cannot be wholly due to a bucolic wariness; the man's manner must have contributed more or less to rousing that feeling. I should dislike to see you lawed out of your boots, Nat. It's a ridiculous prejudice, of course, but personally I feel an inclination to look askant on these fellows with smooth, insipid names such as — as Slemm, for instance. There's Slaney — he's an example!

This is a fatiguing long letter for you to wade through, but I promised Williams. Duty performed is a rainbow in the soul! Indeed, most of our letters here can only interest you because they are from home; the town is dull; we look to *you* for the real news. But somehow I can't get the late lamented Mr. Granger and his youthful white head, and his prowess with the rifle, out of my mind. Do you know that, before you left, I noticed that you were getting quite gray at the temples? And as for your rifle-shooting — "eye sartain — finger lightning — aim death!" as was observed of Mr. Leatherstocking Bumppo, whose name was Nat, too, by the way.

It is three o'clock in the morning, and I am falling asleep as you will have judged already by some of this drivel. Good-bye.

Affectionately,

JIM.

Lieutenant George Ducey to his mother

Camp on the Rio Grande, Aug. '46

MY DEAR MOTHER,

We marched up here last week to a place on the river-bank which is opposite a little dog-hole of a Mexican town called Burrito, that is *donkey* in Spanish.[1] I, for one, am mighty glad to get out of the camp at the *Boca del Rio*, the mouth of the river you know, which was an awful hole worse than this, hot and muddy and the biggest mosquitos you ever saw — regular gally-nippers. I went myself to ever so many of the commanding officers and told them in my opinion we ought to be moved, but nothing was done for quite a while. And I must say that I was *very much* surprised to find out what sort of people our *highest* officers are — nothing but rough, common men, without the least education or manners. When I saw Colonel Twiggs he had a two-days' beard, and swore fit to raise your hair every other word. Yet they've made him a brigadeer-general. This is suposed to be a much healthier place than our camp at the *Boca;* but we never would have got up here if the regimental doctors had not told Taylor that he must move us to another camp *mucho pronto*, just as I had suggested, or all the men would be too *enferma* to fight. We are a little more comfortable here. You couldn't get any washing done at the *Boca* for love or money, but I've found a *muchacha* here (that is one of the native women, you know) who took my shirts and did them up tolerably well, though not as they would have been done at home. I carefully explained to her how to starch them in Spanish, but she seemed to be very stupid, and just *wouldn't* understand a single *palabra*. A palabra is a *word*, you know. I expect I ought to apologize for using Spanish to you, but I simply can't help it. I picked it up right away, and have got into the habit so

[1] Lieutenant Ducey's information, like his spelling, will be found somewhat inaccurate. — ED.

sometimes I'm afraid I'll forget my English. Everybody says it's wonderful how quick I learned it; nobody else can *ablar Espanol* hardly at all yet, and I notice that some of my brother-officers are a little jealous and inclined to make sneering remarks, and it's funny to see how they'll make signs, or take any kind of trouble rather than ask me to translate for them. I don't *offer* to help them, as I don't propose to be made use of that way. They can pay people to do their translating if they want to.

Speaking of *pay*, I'm glad I don't have to pay any more than I do, for your *dinero* (money) don't last long here as it is. These *Mexicanos* are the *worst* robbers; they charge you the *mas* (most) exorbitant prices for everything, even the commonest necessities of life. It takes every cent I've got for bare comfort, and don't leave anything in case of emergencies. Don't worry though; I can manage somehow, I supose. The only serious question is if I should get sick like our other brave fellows, I wouldn't have enough to pay for being taken care of; however, I guess I could get along by myself, unless I got the *vomito*, which is almost sure to be fatal, especially when the patient is neglected. There is a good deal of *vomito* around, but it hasn't got eppidemic *yet.*

Everybody has been across the *rio* to take a look at Burito; and some have been up to see Matamoras which is a few miles up the *rio*, and you can go on the steam-transport-boat. I went the other day, *and thereby hangs a tail.* Don't read this part before Francie, until you've read it all to yourself. I myself think she *ought to be told*, as she and all of you have always thought *Captain Burke* was such a *model* young man. *I* never thought so, because I *don't tell all I know* not by a *good deal*, but this is so *fragrant* it wouldn't be *right* to keep it in the dark. I question whether a man of his habits ought to be allowed to go around and mix with people one knows, *ladies* especially. To begin at the beginning when we were down at the *Boca* where we had to stay for more than a week, we used to see all the boats with stuff for the army coming in from New Orleans and New York and the transports and volunteers landing every day, quite a sight; and one day one of them had on board a lot of actors going on up to Matamoras which is a pretty big town you

know, for this country, and has a theatre or some place where they give performances. There were several *ladies* — you can imagine what kind they were — sitting on the decks with some of the *gentlemen* of the troupe, with wine which they were drinking out of the bottles, and they had got some of the *pulque* that they sell so much of around here of a *peon* fellow on the dock and were drinking that, too, and calling out to us on land, and singing and cutting up *high jinks* generally. Some of our fellows were looking on, of course, men and officers both, and I said to Kennard of the Baltimore Battalion (they are camped next to us) "Isn't that perfectly disgusting?" Kennard didn't say anything, and I saw he was looking very hard at Burke, who was staring with all his eyes at *somebody* in the crowd on board, I couldn't make out who. Then he turned around and said without seeing me: "Kennard I can't help feeling sorry for those poor women." Afterwards he walked away *very slowly* and *thoughtfully* and I said to Kennard "Burke must be hard hit. I wonder which one the charmer was." Kennard didn't answer for a minute, then he said. "Oh, *Lord!*" and he walked off, too. He's a queer kind of fish, but you meet ever so many down here. I could see, however, that Burke had purposely avoided me, not wanting, I suppose to be caught at *that sort of thing* by anybody that knew him; he was always a close-mouthed fellow anyhow, you know, and you never can tell what these *Puritannic* men are up to in secret. That was just before we got our marching orders; and the minute we reached here Burke got leave for twenty-four hours and went off to Matamoras and *spent the day and night*, never coming back until the next morning looking rather the worse for wear. Of course that don't *prove* anything, but wait and hear what came next. He was off duty again yesterday when I went up, and I *saw him with her!* It's as plain as day to me now, and will be to you presently when I've told you the whole thing. His *lady-love* must have been one of the cargo of actors, though, of course, I didn't see everyone of them, and certainly wouldn't *swear* to having seen *her*. A person has to be awfully particular about a thing like this, and I hope I know what's *honorable*. This just goes to show that some people like the noble, immacculate Captain are pretty deep, and not quite so *white* as they paint themselves.

I took a good look at the woman, although people like that haven't any attractions for *me*, but this was a duty; and . . .
(Page torn off and the rest of the letter missing.)

Mrs. William Ducey to Mrs. Cornelia Marsh.

(no date)

DEAREST MA

I have only time for a note to enclose Georgie's letter which of course you will want to read as it has just come direct from the army and besides has other things in it that will interest you even if you aren't particularly interested in him. Please don't fail to return it as you know I have kept every scrap he has ever written me. I know Ma you think I am ridiculous about George but if you would just remember that he's *my son* and all the child I've got in the world I don't think you would say the things you did in your last letter which I have to tell you cut me awfully. Of course I know George isn't perfect but you forget that he is very young and his character isn't all formed yet and sometimes he does say funny things like that about his being so good at Spanish when I don't see how he can be after only two or three weeks and I dont think he ought to have gone and bothered his superior officers who must have a great deal on their minds anyhow by telling them what they ought to do when they must have known more about it than he did and had a great deal more experience or they wouldn't be where they are. You see dear Ma I see George's faults the same as you do but I know that he will get all over them in a little while he's only twenty-two now and I don't believe I had as much sense at twenty-two as I have now. I won't send you any more of his letters as you don't care to read them but this one was important on account of what he says about Nathan Burke. It is very shocking. Do you think Mary Sharpless ought to be told? It would be an awful thing for any decent girl let alone a *lady* like Mary to marry such a man but I wouldn't want to be the person to tell her about him. Not that I think Mary would be heart-broken over it she's not that kind and everybody here knows that she just took him because she was afraid of being an old maid forever and she couldn't get Jack Vardaman for all her fishing. Anyway Nathan

may get shot in the war and one wouldn't like to bring up anything against him after he was dead and if he was to come back all crippled up Mary wouldn't have him anyhow so there's not much use my worrying. It's a great deal better to wait a while and see what happens for it may all come out some other way you know they say murder will out. I haven't told Francie but I gave the letter to William and Uncle George to read and of course they were both very much surprised the whole thing is so strange and unexpected and Will said Well truth is certainly stranger than fiction and Uncle George said that By d—— some people didn't know the difference between 'em. Nathan's such a favorite of his he simply won't believe anything against him, you know and then he never did love George. But I never contradict Uncle George nowadays he's getting so old and feeble we just let him say what he pleases.

You know he is going to draw out of the business. William says by September first Uncle George will be out and the partnership dissolved. Will is so happy it gives him a free hand at last and he will be able to do so much better he says they have lost thousands of dollars this last year by Uncle George's slowness and unwillingness to go into any enterprise. I don't know what Uncle George will do with himself without the store, but he has plenty of money anyhow and don't need to make any more.

There isn't any news for everybody is just sitting around waiting to hear from the war. I heard that Jimmie Sharpless was planning to go but he's never said a word to us about it and I'm sure he's had plenty of chances for he's up here every night of the world to see Francie. Poor Louise Andrews Louise Gwynne that was you know is very low with inflammation of the lungs and not expected to live. I feel so sorry for her husband and those two little children.

My *note* has stretched out into a pretty long letter hasn't it? Must stop now with ever so much love

ANN

P.S. I do hope you won't feel hurt at what I said about what you said about Georgie it's just that you don't seem to understand him and don't realize that he hasn't had time to develope yet. Lovingly ANN.

CHAPTER II

In which we make Some New Friends and meet one Old One

Mitchell's regiment, which numbered some eight hundred men, was sent down by way of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers and the Gulf, traversing the latter in the first steam-propelled vessel many of them had ever beheld; and during this part of the journey one at least of these eight hundred warriors, not being used to salt-water navigation, was in a very unwarriorlike state of physical collapse, so that the feeblest of Mexicans could have made an end of him in short order. The troops were disembarked July Fourth — which should have been a good omen although everybody forgot the date until days afterwards! — at the Brazos on a sandy island where were already collected several thousand volunteers, and in this salubrious spot they remained for about a fortnight, after which they were moved first to a camp at the mouth of the Rio Grande, and later about fifteen miles further up the river, giving all of them a chance to get acquainted on the march with "that d—d chaparral," As an obstruction to the passage of an army it merited all the derogatory comment passed upon it; but our fellows took it cheerfully enough; they fell into the habit of calling any kind of resistant undergrowth "chaparral," whether cactus, maguey, mesquite, or what-not, nor have I ever found out to what the name actually and correctly applied. The discomforts of this campaign in the middle of summer, with torrid heats, plunging downpours of rain, bottomless mud, invincible dust, a plentiful variety of insects and vermin comparable only to those that beset the Egyptians, rations not always of the first quality, and no immediate expectation of a fight to raise the spirits — these are incident to all campaigns and need not be dwelt upon here. Captain Burke, who was not without some sense of humor, occasionally wondered with a grin that the title to such a country

should ever have been disputed, or if there was a man in our ranks, not excepting himself, who knew what we were fighting about! He himself withstood the hardships of the life tolerably well, being of a somewhat philosophical turn of mind, and, what was more to the purpose perhaps, of a lean, tough, and enduring body; the expedition and encampment brought vaguely to his memory old martial myths, the black ships, the many-tented plain of windy Troy; he had read of them how long ago! when he was a boy in the stable-loft behind the Ducey house, stumbling amongst the alien names, and thrilling through all his backwoodsman blood to the great sounding recital of adventure and conquest. Indeed, the camp here on the Rio Grande, besides the constantly arriving and departing vessels, the crowding troops from every State in the Union with their one speech and their astounding variety of talk, the flying rumors, the alarums and excursions, was not lacking in other points of resemblance. General Twiggs was encamped above the town of Matamoros; General Worth, near at hand, below it; General Taylor himself just outside; heroic celebrities, as great to the imagination of an obscure young captain of volunteers as any that ever stalked through the pages of the Æneid, were to be familiarly seen, nay, even met and talked with, like ordinary men, any hour of the day. Burke himself was actually presented to that ideal of his earlier years, little George Croghan. The youthful defender of Fort Stephenson was now a weatherbeaten veteran of sixty-odd, still in the service and lately appointed Inspector of Volunteers, in which capacity Nat encountered him. The Ohio captain, who had ignorantly supposed the inspector to be some younger edition of little Georgie, was delighted; but alack, Colonel Croghan turned out to be an abrupt, cold-tempered, elderly gentleman with that not very carefully concealed scorn of the volunteer service which was entertained by some of the regular-army officers, and when Burke ventured to mention Fort Stephenson and to inquire if the Colonel happened to remember a scout named Jake Darnell, — "Huh — Fort Stephenson — huh!" says the other, scowling upon him; "Darnell, huh? No, I never heard of him. Never asked the name of a single damn scout in my life!" with which amiable speech the interview ended.

Drawing-room manners were perhaps not to be expected in this great concourse of men of all classes brought together, high and low, good, bad, and indifferent for one savage purpose. But, to tell the truth, Burke thought he discerned a certain popularity in roughness-and-readiness throughout the camp. Nobody could have been more genuinely simple in his tastes, more careless of display, more patient under every kind of makeshift and discomfort than the plain and sturdy old leader. It was natural that those habits and qualities that so endeared him to the rank-and-file and to the American public at large should have been imitated, or rather travestied and exaggerated, by others eager for the popularity to which General Taylor himself never gave a thought. "He's camping in a tent up there about a mile outside of Matamoros when he might just as well be comfortably housed in the town," one officer told Burke with a look of wonder, describing a recent visit he had made to the head of the army; "he's made Twiggs governor of Matamoros, you know, and I expect he thinks this will be more convenient and prevent any clashing of authority. Anyhow, there he is. His tent is just like all the others, pitched right out in the broiling sun, just a few of these little twisted, gnarled-up trees they grow down here on one side of it, and not a guard nor a sentry in sight, Burke! There was a fat little youngster, a child of some camp-follower, I suppose, playing right outside it. I got there just as the general was getting through with a deputation — of civilians, you know — representing some people in New Orleans that wanted to vote him something — I don't know what it was all about. Whatever it was, he was declining the honor. I heard him say that while he appreciated their generosity, he thought there would be a certain impropriety in his receiving a reward for his services before the campaign, so far as he was concerned, was finished. And he went on and gave them a talk on the mistake people made in naming children and places after men before they were dead! I suppose they had wanted to do something of the kind. Maybe it wasn't very politic, but I tell you it was good horse-sense, and I believe the committee saw it that way. How many other men in public life that people were sounding for the Presidency would have done it, do you suppose? I'll bet there's not another in the country!"

"Shouldn't wonder!" said Burke, thinking, with a smile, of Governor Gwynne. "What does he look like?"

"Why, heavy set, rather, with gray hair — pretty near white it is, too; he's over sixty, you know — and blue eyes, or gray eyes, I couldn't say exactly — clean-shaven, tanned like an Indian, of course. I think he'd be a fair-complexioned man naturally. He was sitting on a dry-goods box with one of those red Arkansas blankets folded up on top of it for a cushion, and he didn't have on fatigue uniform, but a kind of a linen jacket and pantaloons, and a straw hat about three feet wide, more or less. There wasn't a thing in the tent but his iron camp-cot, and a couple of blue-painted chests that he was using for a table. It might have been your tent or mine. No gold-braid and bugle-tooting about *him, I* tell you. I guess the folks at home would think he looked more like a Louisiana planter than the general of the biggest army we've ever got together." He paused, reflecting with a puckered forehead, then burst out enthusiastically: "All the same, Burke, he's a *general,* and about the only one we've had since Washington — of course there's Scott, too. But I believe the men, the regulars, the fellows that *know* him, would follow Zachary Taylor to hell, if he just got on old Whitey's back and said, 'Come on, boys!' Look how fond they are of him — they talk about him the whole time."

This was true, as Burke had already noticed. He used to hear the camp-fire gossip: Old Zack did this, Old Zack said that; even the volunteers, hundreds of whom, like Burke himself, had never yet seen him, had caught the contagion of affectionate pride and confidence. The general had turned out of his bed to give it to a sick private in some sudden dearth of beds, himself sleeping rolled up in a blanket on the ground. When the two armies lay opposite each other before Matamoros, General Arista replied to the American commander's remonstrance that the Mexican soldiers were robbing and mutilating the bodies of the American dead by the statement that these atrocities were not committed by the Mexican army, but by camp-followers whom he could not control. "When I come over the river, I will control them!" said our stout old chief. And he did. These and a dozen other like stories circulated among the troops; and it may be thought

a strange thing, but one, I believe, that has been observed before, that what all these rough fellows admired and respected in their leader, more even than his courage, was his humanity.

The last-named quality was, however, either not so apparent or not so easily parodied as the rough-and-readiness; officers and men, we became not too fastidious in our habits; we smoked, we chewed, we drank, I fear our army swore dreadfully in Texas. We must have been a distressing spectacle to disciplinarians like Lieutenant Ducey. George himself was as much the dandy officer as he had been at home, to the wonder and the very great recreation of his fellow-soldiers. I have seen the sentries stare and break into smothered guffaws behind his back as the lieutenant strutted by, head up and chest well thrown out, scented, pink, and shaven, creaking in his tight belt, his brilliantly polished boots, twirling his moustache, which was a magnificent growth by this time, and flashing killing glances out of his large dark eyes at any woman who looked worth it. The young man was not more popular here than he had been at home. What was it that was the matter with George Ducey? A man need not be less a man for being fond of fine clothes and of looking in the mirror; there were idle and worthless youths in plenty, there were fops and braggarts among us, but I am sure they made some friends. George made none, or none that he kept. The officers, both regular and volunteer, whom we met would not take him into comradeship; Captain Burke began to hear disagreeable rumors; George borrowed and did not pay; George lost all his money at euchre to some expert and he reported the fact to Colonel Mitchell, and talked loud about cheating and professional gamblers — "hang him, can't he keep his mouth shut? If he *will* play, he ought to take his medicine!" said one young fellow to another testily. "Cheat, hey? I cheat, do I?" said the winner, with a perfectly brutal laugh. "Tell him from me that I'll spank him on sight!" These tales came to Captain Burke only after long and devious wanderings throughout the entire camp, for curiously enough there was a general impression that Ducey and he were in some way related, founded, perhaps, on the fact that they came from the same place and were even members of the same com-

pany; and on one or two occasions the captain had undertaken George's debts, being loath to let washerwomen and such small fry go unpaid. So that even General Twiggs, whose acquaintance Burke had made some while before, remarked to him one day that he understood that young Ducey fellow was some connection of his — was it a step-brother? Burke explaining that this was a mistake — "Well, I'm glad to hear it," said the general, briskly, adding in that richly ornamented style of speech for which he was noted: "By G—d, Captain, I was going to say if it was so, you had a d—d liar for a step-brother!" But I do not think this notion was ever entirely corrected. Not only at Matamoros, but later during almost the whole time our armies spent in Mexico, Burke would receive casual inquiries about his step-brother, his cousin, even his nephew, for the captain appeared much the elder, although, in fact, there were but three or four years between them. It was not until the American troops reached Mexico City, after more than a year's campaigning, that these questions ceased, and then only after various events which influenced Burke's fellow-officers, out of a mistaken kindness, to refrain from mentioning the captain's relative at all.

The young man whom I quoted at length a little way back was almost Burke's first acquaintance; he belonged to the Maryland troops, and was surely one of the bravest soldiers and best gentlemen that ever lived — as indeed his whole career testified. The friendship began, for an oddity, through a fearful squabble between half a dozen companies of their respective regiments over a catfish caught by somebody on either one or the other side — no one ever found out which; and this, occurring about twilight with oaths, blows, drawn weapons, and a terrific riot, might have involved the two entire regiments in a bloody scrimmage and had the most appalling results, had not a few officers retained influence and presence of mind enough to keep their men in their company streets, and afterwards running in between the most violent, succeeded in persuading them not to fire on one another, and finally brought them to reason. In the course of these exertions the two captains encountered, to the vast relief of each.

"Lord, I never shall forget how I felt when you started in," the Maryland officer confided to the other after a truce had been patched up, and they walked away together from the field. "One shot would have started them all, and Heaven knows how many lives might have been wasted in this miserable fuss. Somebody had ordered your fellows to load up with ball cartridge — it was just as bad on our side. Watson, our colonel, is off duty and gone somewhere, and for a while there didn't seem to be any of our officers around but me. I saw you coming and for a minute I was afraid you might be as crazy as the rest." He stopped, drew a long breath, and wiped his forehead. "Whew! I don't think we'll have much hotter work with the Mexicans."

"I wish we could get our men under the same discipline as the regulars," Burke said enviously; "you never hear of any such disgraceful rumpus between *them*. I suppose your company is just like mine — some of 'em good, sober, steady, orderly men — some just hoodlums — some nothing but boys out for a frolic. I think they'll all fight; but that doesn't do much good if they won't obey orders, and behave themselves."

"That's so," assented the other. "We haven't heard the last of this, either. Both our colonels will probably make complaint at headquarters, you know." He hesitated a moment, then put out his hand and said with a very kind, straightforward, and winning manner, "Well, whatever bad blood there is between the men, that's no reason why we should be enemies, Captain. My name's Kennard of the Baltimore Battalion." Whereupon, Captain Burke naming himself in turn, the two young men shook hands heartily.

The regiments being encamped side by side, they saw more or less of each other thereafter; they used to exchange opinions, smoking in their tents in off hours, on the conduct of the campaign, the character of the generals, the state of the army, the nature of the country, and the Mexicans themselves, for whom both felt a sort of contemptuous pity. The last topic, indeed, engrossed a good deal of their talk, neither of them ever having been in a foreign country before. Kennard, coming from the big eastern city with its port on the Atlantic, its larger society, its more cosmopolitan atmosphere than had Burke's little inland town, was still hardly less impressed

than the quondam farmer-boy, though by very different aspects of the scene. Nat surveyed the sad, rain-soaked, or sun-baked landscape, the endless cactus, the Biblical-looking ploughs, the donkeys, the little grave black oxen, the women carrying their terra-cotta water-jars on their heads after an unbelievably Oriental fashion, the swaggering, jingling, lariated, be-spurred, and be-pistolled ranchmen, with unending wonder, and also, although he was of a rather practical turn, with some appreciation of their picturesque possibilities. He found himself reminded almost in one breath, as it were, of the Arabian Nights and the Old Testament; Rebecca, Naomi, Sinbad, and Ali Baba would be equally at home in Mexico, and might elbow one another in the road without incongruity, he thought. Kennard, on the other hand, plainly suffered, to the exclusion of any other sentiment, from a kind of depression at sight of the ignorance, disease, and poverty surrounding us.

"Poor creatures!" he used to ejaculate. "Did you ever see anything so wretched, so apathetic, so near to the brutes as these peons? They're forever sitting on the ground — they *live* crawling around on the ground like ants; they eat and sleep wherever they happen to be, like dogs. They haven't any *homes* — you can't call these adobe hovels they live in, fifteen or twenty people all pigging together, you can't call them *homes*. Why, our negro slaves wouldn't live that way — we wouldn't allow it — we take care of our slaves, and see that they're clean and healthy — I suppose you don't think so, coming from your State — " he interrupted himself, glancing at his companion a little sharply, "but —"

"Why, I should think you'd take the best of care of them," said Burke, smoking steadily. "That would be common sense and good policy, to say nothing of humanity."

"Of course," said the other, satisfied; "but I was going to tell you I went into one of their dens the other day, over in Burito, just for curiosity. There were half a dozen women, old hags at twenty-five or thirty, you know how they get to looking, one girl not more than fourteen years old, I swear, suckling a baby. I don't know how many other babies sprawling on the dirt floor, stark naked two of 'em, with their faces all broken out in sores —"

"You ought to be careful," interrupted Burke; "you

don't want to start an epidemic among the men, let alone getting some kind of contagion yourself."

"'Twasn't anything but chicken-pox, I think, and I've had that. Besides, the camp is full of mumps and measles anyway — the contagion I'd carry wouldn't be a drop in the bucket. There was a live turkey tied by the leg under a shelf, a couple of men asleep — dead drunk — on benches. *Gr-r-ungh!* I never saw a worse hole, no, not even along the water-front at home. The difference is that you can't stop to look in at a place like that at home without getting a crack on the head —"

"In Mexico it's more likely to be a knife through your back, hey?" said Burke, grinning.

"No, that's what seems to me so remarkable. These people are really well disposed towards us; it's the way we've acted. We pay as we go and we certainly pay high, and we treat 'em like human beings. One of them that could speak a little English told me the other day that they liked us better than Arista's army. And these poor things in the hut looked up and smiled and invited me in, and one of the women offered me a *tortilla* she'd just baked — one of those corn-meal cakes they make, you know. She was slopping around with the dough — batter — whatever they call it, on a slanting board, the way they stir 'em up — you've seen them in market, haven't you? It wasn't very appetizing, but I took it anyhow, and threw it away after I got outside."

"I suppose those that we buy in camp here, when the women come around with the trays of stuff, are all made the same way and in just such places," Burke said. "They don't taste bad. If we never get any worse than that, we'll be doing well. Is there a market at Burito? I didn't see it."

"Why, no, I meant the market at Matamoros. Haven't you been there yet?"

Captain Burke had not yet been to Matamoros. Let's go to Matamoros, by all means. "It's a real Mexican town — just as Mexican as can be," Kennard told him. "I'll tell you what: let's arrange to stay all night, and go to the theatre. Don't you remember that theatrical company we saw going up the river? They're there now. Matamoros is full to the guards, you know — all kinds of people. Ask where they come from and every mother's son of 'em

will tell you New Orleans. Further than that nobody knows, and better not ask, I guess. I know a fellow that's with the regulars there — with the artillery. His name's Ridgely, and maybe I can get him to take us around."

Next day Captain Burke got his leave of absence for the twenty-four hours; but Kennard was disappointed of his, so that the first-named gentleman was obliged regretfully to set out alone. Kennard scrawled a note of introduction to Lieutenant Randolph Ridgely of the Light Artillery, who was, in fact, a member of the lamented Major Ringgold's famous battery, and had borne himself with great gallantry on the fields of Palo Alto and Resaca — another hero whom Burke was highly pleased to meet. Being furnished with this, the captain went across the river to Burito and bought a wild, little, evil-eyed, and cat-motioned mustang pony for six dollars upon which he proposed to make the trip; but the steamboat *Virginia* opportunely happening along, he took passage on her instead, and arriving at Matamoros about noon, disembarked and wandered up into the streets, staring with his alien eyes upon the worn and antique town that showed yellow and blue and many-colored walls, and roofs of thatch or tiles and outlandish semi-tropic greenery under the July sun. About all the Mexican towns that Burke saw — although this may have been merely his perverted fancy — there hung an invincible melancholy; their busy, discordant market-places, their gaudy shops were not lively; even the presence of the invader, whether they hated, or liked, or only suffered us, could not arouse them to anything resembling movement or energy; we paid our way handsomely and must have brought them more trade than they ever had before or since (surely the descendants of a nation of shopkeepers may take a little pride in that statement); yet even so it was as if the spirit of the people stood aloof and regarded us not resentfully, but with a sphinxlike detachment, absorbed in its own sombre meditation. As Burke walked up from the landings, there was some bustle of arrival, the town was full of soldiers, one of our bands — the Seventh Regiment, I think — was practising in the alameda, booming out "The Low-Back'd Car" with all its brazen lungs, there were people passing to and fro, bright draperies, flapping flags, yet one had but to pause and look

aside — and lo, the vista of a long, pensive, silent street, high, blank walls, iron-grated windows, glaring, white, unkind sunlight, cold shadow , a native woman, shapeless under her blue cotton head-shawl, crouching in the dust; the scene not two steps separated from the first, yet ineffably remote, a piece of ancient civilization grafted on a commingled civilization and savagery more ancient still — old as these established hills. The young fellow, fresh from the sturdy drab and homespun activity of his Ohio town that numbered scarcely more years than himself, felt a slight depression at this settled and pervasive antiquity; the very cathedral on the plaza looked venerable, although it was a comparatively new building, as yet unfinished; he took it at first for an interesting ruin — not the only one he saw, for the town bore traces of our cannonading from Fort Brown on the opposite side of the river. Few lives had been lost, however, Ampudia having evacuated the place almost without a blow. Nat had the honor of dining in the house lately occupied by the Mexican general, and now converted into the "Fonda del Comercio" by an enterprising American. Captain Burke was the guest within these historic portals of Lieutenant Ridgely, to whom he went and presented his letter of introduction, and whom he found to be a most cordial, agreeable, and soldierly-looking gentleman, who insisted on giving him the Maryland welcome of a meal.

"I can't answer for it," he said with a laugh; "but at any rate it won't be any worse than camp-fare. Weren't you surprised to find the place fairly boiling over with Americans? It's miraculous how quick they all got here. Sir, I declare we hadn't been in occupation a week when they all came down like — like the water at Lodore in the poem. American goods, American drinks, American storekeepers, faro-dealers, saloon-men, gamblers, horse-thieves — they've run the Mexicans clean out — never saw anything like it!"

Between this and other speeches which the gallant lieutenant delivered with great energy, eating and drinking, pressing the captain to more rabbit, more eggs, more fricasseed kidney, more coffee and soda-biscuit, and ordering the slouching Mexican waiters about in halting but vigorous Spanish with that extraordinary manner at once amiable and imperative in which so many southerners address their

servants — between times he pointed out to his companion numbers of celebrities, for it appeared the "Fonda del Comercio" was much patronized by the army. Captain Burke was not sorry to find himself in this distinguished and interesting company. It is one thing to read in print about Captain Walker and his band of Texas Rangers armed with "Colt's patent repeaters," who, fifty of them, had stood off fifteen hundred Mexicans in a pitched fight on the banks of this same Rio Grande no longer ago than last April — it is one thing to read about this exploit, and another to behold a wiry-looking gentleman of two- or three-and-thirty years, tanned to the color of a Mexican saddle, peaceably eating pork and beans (with his knife) at a table within arms' length, and be told that that man is Captain Samuel Walker "of the Rangers, you know." He has on a sort of nondescript uniform, his "patent repeater," nay, his two patent repeaters, may be clearly seen, hitched to his belt and reposing one on either hip; he converses with the waiter in that nasal and singsong Spanish peculiar to this country. The volunteer captain stares at him unreservedly. Powers above, what has this man not done and endured! What bloody battles against desperate odds has he waged with Seminoles, Comanches, Mexicans! He has known starvation and fever in the horrid prison-cells of Perote — escaped — been retaken — escaped again a dozen times. At Salado Santa Anna condemned him and his handful of wretches to decimation by lot — one black bean in the bowl of white for every tenth man. He escaped once more. "I should think he'd never want to see another bean!" Burke says, thinking of this incident, and observing with what gusto the Ranger is stowing them away. His companion laughs, and an officer, who has just come in and has been giving his order in very fluent and easy Spanish, pauses by their table and asks if there is room for him? "Why, of course, sir. General, my friend Captain Burke of the First Ohio. Burke, General Quitman."

Nat got up and saluted; but the other offered his hand. "Why, Captain Burke, you and I are in the same boat and ought to stand by each other; we're nothing but volunteers, you know, and we're only too glad to get a little notice from one of these regulars — a fellow like Ridgely, here, for in-

stance," said the general, pleasantly; and went on — as they sat down — to say that he was especially glad to meet the men who might presently come under his personal command. "I understand all the volunteers are to be organized into a field division under Butler or Hamer and in all probability I shall have a brigade."

"You'll get your own Mississippi men, and some of the other troops from the Southern States," Ridgely prophesied blithely; "the Southern men had better be all shaken down together. Burke here can tell you that," he said, winking. Quitman, looking at Burke, smiled and asked if he was one of the officers who had taken a hand in quelling the disturbance the other evening? "I take an interest in Ohio," he added; "I lived there for a while twenty years or so ago, when I was a young fellow about like you — or even younger, I guess. Do you know anybody in D— County?"

Nathan flushed up. "I was born there," he said with a boyish stir of sentiment at the chance reference. Perhaps General Quitman himself was not ill-pleased in this far place to meet some one with whom he could pass a common memory. He talked quite eagerly about D— and its people, and the Scioto; and when Ridgely was obliged to go on duty and the little party broke up, separated from them with warm expressions of regret.

Burke, thrown once more on his own resources, went out and roamed about the streets and market-house in the laudable purpose of acquiring some closer knowledge of the natives, and improving his command of the Spanish, or more properly, the Mexican tongue; meeting an occasional black look, but finding the people in general very simple, kind, and obliging, and ready to help out his stumbling phrases. Ridgely had hardly exaggerated; Matamoros *was* boiling over with Americans — and not the most select assortment at that. To judge by the society our army attracted and the quality of entertainment provided for it, you might have supposed it was made up of drunken rowdies and blackguards. Burke went into what appeared to be one of the most popular barrooms of the place, which flourished under the title of "The Grand Spanish Saloon" — the establishment not presenting, however, a single Spanish feature. It was a long, low-ceil-

inged room like a tunnel, its only window, which was really a pair of glass double-doors in the usual Mexican fashion, opening on an inner court, floored with slimy bricks, where some potted plants sickened in the over-heated foul air. The bar occupied one side; on the other there were a great number of tables where many gentlemen of various complexions, but an equal and most astonishing degree of skill, were engaged at roulette, faro, keno, chuck-a-luck and other ingenious pastimes. All these practitioners went armed, it seemed, and seldom in his life has Captain Burke been received with more marked attention; he could not approach a table without some member of the party seated thereat starting a little nervously and feeling for his weapon! At the back of the room, after having made the tour of both sides, the captain found, to his unqualified amazement, a coffee-stand in charge of a lean, quiet-looking youth of eighteen or so, who was reading in the corner. The stand, which was nothing more than a board across a couple of barrels, was draped in red curtain-calico and spread with clean white paper; there was a tin coffee-urn and some plates of cakes. Burke, wondering within him who patronized this modest enterprise in such a place, went up and asked for coffee, and the boy got up, set the spirit-lamp going, and served him gravely. He was shabbily dressed but had a pair of clean hands, — very nearly the first Nat had seen in Mexico, — and the coffee was hot and fairly good.

"This isn't a very good place for a boy like you, my lad," said the captain — who, being at this time somewhere in the neighborhood of twenty-five years of age, and of a sober character and experience, was inclined sometimes to take himself pretty seriously. The other looked at him with a kind of sprite-like humor, in which there showed, too, both understanding and good-nature; he had a thin, spirited, and singularly mobile face.

"Well, I don't know that it's such a very good place for an old man like you, grandpa," he remarked. Their eyes met; and Nat had the grace to burst out laughing — a laugh in which the boy joined whole-heartedly.

"Well, but I mean it," Burke persisted. "How do you happen to be here?"

"Business," said the other, succinctly, beginning to clear

away the coffee-cup and spoon. "We thought we'd get more customers in a place like this."

"Do you, though?"

"I don't know — I never tried selling coffee before, so I can't tell whether we're doing a roaring trade, or only just keeping our heads above water," said the boy, with gravity. "I haven't anything to compare by, you see."

Here a sallow, black-haired man in black broadcloth with a diamond on his little finger, another in his shirt-front, a silk hat, and a pistol in his hip-pocket — one of the gamblers, in short, lounged forward and spun a dollar on the counter. "Gimme a cup of coffee, Joe." Nathan sat down on a whiskey-keg, conveniently near, and watched Joe serve out the hot drink. "Keep the change — that's all right — keep it!" said his patron, magnificently, and swaggered away, barely glancing at the humble infantry-officer sitting by. Joe picked up the dollar, thoughtfully. "That wouldn't happen in a respectable place, I suppose," he said, grinning a little.

"You haven't always done this, then?" Nathan asked him.

"Hey? Had a coffee-stand? Well, no, I should think *not!*" said the other, with some youthful arrogance. "I'm an actor."

"Oh. Are you with the company here in town? The ones that came up the river the other day?" said Burke, surprised and faintly disappointed. At the time of which I write there was a disposition in certain circles to look with disapproval on what we now acknowledge to be one of the noblest of professions. I am glad to say that Mr. Burke had never shared this absurd and stupid and cruel prejudice; but he had happened to see the dramatic troupe he mentioned on their journey, and this boy, who was plainly too good for his present employment, should be also, Nat thought, too good for that miserable crew, those painted, haggard, loud-mouthed women, and coarse men. Indeed, young Joe flushed a good deal, and cast a troubled look at his questioner.

"No, no — I don't act with *them*. I'm here with my mother and sister; we — we don't even know those people," he explained hastily; "we've been here for months — came from Galveston this Spring. We heard the guns at Palo

Alto the very day we got here, while we were on the steamboat at Point Isabel."

"You don't say! Why, you were here through it all," exclaimed Burke, interested. "Gracious! You didn't see any of the fighting, did you?"

"Oh, no. But we saw Ringgold's funeral," said the boy, with enthusiasm; "they had him on one of the gun-carriages — what do you call 'em? — a caisson, isn't it? — with the flag spread over him and all the soldiers marching with their arms reversed, and the drums muffled, and the band going soft — it was solemn and awful — it was a great sight!" The dramatic aspect of the scene, it was evident, touched him deeply; his young voice vibrated as he spoke.

"It's a wonder you didn't enlist on the spot," said Burke, a little amused.

"Well, military funerals aren't exactly an inducement, you know," retorted the other, with a slight yet curiously contagious chuckle; then his face sobered. "Besides, I can't leave mother," he said seriously. "This wouldn't be any place for her and my sister without me to take care of them. It's not much of a place for women — American women — anyhow."

"You've been here ever since, then?"

"Yes — oh, yes. We were acting in the theatre here, you know. Then, here a couple of weeks ago, our manager vamoosed — cleared out — with all the receipts, and some back-salaries. That left us all —" he spread his hands and brought them down on the slab in front of him with a gesture in which one saw a complete void, a world of emptiness — "flat — stony broke —" he said with a kind of airy tragedy, cheerful and unafraid. "No use trying to get after him, you know — we couldn't have got anything out of him, even if we could have found him."

"What became of the rest of your company?" Burke asked, not a little entertained by this slight glimpse of the players' world. Joe shook his head.

"Don't know," he said light-heartedly; "most of 'em scraped up the money to go — get back to the States somehow. One fellow stayed, and he and I went into this together — firm's name is Badger and Jefferson — Edward Badger and Joseph Jefferson. We used to do the comedy parts together." He gave a light sigh, and meditatively

rearranged his cups and saucers. "Texas may be all right for a ranger," he said profoundly, "but I'm convinced it's no field for the legitimate."

"The legitimate?" said Burke, not understanding.

"Yes — the regular drama. 'Now is the winter of our discontent —' and all the rest of it. Maybe I'll have to enlist yet. You're one of the enlisted men, the volunteers, I mean, aren't you? Doesn't that shoulder-strap, or whatever you call it, mean a captain?"

"Yes, my name's Burke of the Ohio Volunteers."

"Burke? Is that so? I've got a step-brother named Burke. He's an actor, too; he's in Philadelphia now — at least that's the last we heard," said the boy, appearing to take this wide distribution of the family quite as a matter of course. "None of us come from Ohio, though, so I suppose we can't be any relation."

Burke, being himself quite kinless, said that he was afraid not. "Where's your partner?" he added. "Does he leave you to do all the work alone?"

"Oh, no. I guess he's — he's busy somewhere," said the boy, sending — unconsciously, I think — a disturbed glance toward the card-tables. "He always turns up at evening anyhow, so we can go home together. He's got a pistol — person has to be pretty careful after dark here, you know."

It was nearing dusk already, as Burke remarked with surprise. And Badger not appearing, the captain, who carried a patent-repeater himself, volunteered to convoy young Jefferson home with the "swag," as he humorously termed the profits of his day's labor, which he bestowed in a buckskin bag — it did not need a very large one. This treasure he intrusted to Mr. Burke with as much confidence as if he had known that gentleman all his life; and they set out together, Joe himself bearing one of the firm's pies wrapped in a bit of brown paper, for a contribution to the evening meal. "We've got an old Mexican woman that makes 'em for us," he explained; "and I guess they're clean — they haven't poisoned anybody yet, anyway."

The Jeffersons were living in an humble quarter of the town in a Mexican house which must have sheltered half-a-dozen other families. Any number of domestic offices, from plucking chickens for to-morrow's dinner to spanking re-

calcitrant babies, were going on in the patio as we entered; a pretty young Mexican girl who was watering the plants looked up with a smile and flashing white teeth, and a rather coquettish side-glance of big black eyes. "That's Metta — a — a girl I know," said young Jefferson, reddening slightly; "she — she teaches me Spanish." Captain Burke benevolently repressed an impulse to ask what else she taught him; he had a fellow-feeling for the young man — does not all the world love a lover? And we went up the stone steps leading to the inner balcony around the second floor of the establishment, which seems to be a universal feature of Mexican architecture; and Jefferson's mother came out and welcomed us with a manner so kind and dignified and gracious that one of us, who, to tell the truth, had been wondering what an actress would be like, felt at once a touch of shame, and a great admiration. Captain Burke, who, since this episode, has very frequently been asked to describe Mrs. Jefferson, has never been able to say more than that she did not strike him as a noticeably pretty woman, although it is said she "made up" (as they call it) in a royally beautiful style on the stage, where, however, he never had the good fortune to see her. She had a sweet, tired face, a lovely voice, a great deal of perfectly natural and spontaneous grace in movement. I do not think the richest or most exalted people in the world could have offered a more charming hospitality than Mrs. Jefferson contrived with the very little that she had; and I am afraid Mr. Burke sat down to their supper and that famous pie with scarcely any pressing in disgraceful eagerness. It was weeks since the young fellow had seen anything like an American home, or spoken to a woman. Long afterwards his hostess told him, with her kind and gentle laughter, that his delight was almost pathetic. — "And really, General (it's *general* now, isn't it?), our table was awful — cracked china, and not enough plates to go around, and hardly anything to put on the plates!" Burke remembered it as one of the best meals he ever ate in his life; and he stayed an unconscionable time after it, talking to her on the balcony, while the stars came out and looked down into the little courtyard, and young Joseph, having stolen off, was whispering at his sweetheart's window — in Spanish, no doubt — somewhere below us.

The captain took his way thence, intending to find a berth for himself in some sort of rooming-house in the Calle Guanajuato, which Ridgely had pointed out to him as a likely place earlier in the day. There was still a crowd abroad as he walked along — in the middle of the street, as had been enjoined upon him. An unnecessary precaution, Burke thought; the streets were not much darker than those at home, where, as yet, there were no gas-lamps, and the people no different from those one might have seen at this hour in certain quarters of his own city — all kinds of men, and one kind of women. As a matter of fact he got no notice, hostile or otherwise, from either, until, reaching a corner, he stood still for a second in a little uncertainty about the right direction, looking up and down. There was a lamp bracketed against the angle of the building high up overhead; he remembered afterwards, with a curious nicety, the look of the plastered wall tinted a strong pink, with a barred window surrounded by a make-believe cornice and mouldings painted on the flat surface like a drop-scene in a theatre; across the narrow way there was a pulque-shop, "El Sueno De Amor" daubed in flourishing black letters over the door. A woman came out from the shadows of a near-by alley, and touched him on the arm. She almost immediately shrank back, some speech which she had been beginning arrested in inarticulate sound; she shrank back against the pink wall, the scarf over her head fell down, she stared at him with a ghastly face. Nathan looked at her, startled; he made a step forward — a step back.

"Nance!" he cried out; "Nance!"

CHAPTER III

MATAMOROS

SHE did not answer, and for one swift moment Burke fancied he must be mistaken. "I — I thought it was — I thought I knew —" he began to mumble; the words died in his throat in an inexpressible confusion of doubt, wonder, reluctant certainty, formless dismay. She moved as if to put up her hands before her cheeks — which bloomed with a pitiful unnatural red color under the direct light — then let them drop as suddenly. "Nance!" said Burke again, involuntarily lowering his voice as he gazed into her pallid face — pallid with all its mock roses — and her great eyes. Merciful God, what feeling was it of heart-sickening suspicion and shame and distress that prompted him to that secrecy?

"I didn't know it was you, Nat," she said in an undertone, too. She paused, perhaps to collect herself, and then spoke quite firmly and deliberately: "I just thought it was an officer — one of the officers, I didn't know which one — I just saw it was one of the officers in the army."

"What do you want with — what are you doing here?" said Nathan, hoarsely. The question came unwilled to his lips; it was so he greeted her after all these years!

"I guess you know," said Nance. She pulled her scarf, a cheap black lace thing affecting the Spanish style, up over her head and her black glossy hair, carefully dressed with a red artificial rose and gilt gewgaws stuck amongst the braids, straightening the folds with a kind of mechanical coquetry. "If I'd thought quick enough, I'd have got away before you had a chance to see who it was. But I was kind of taken by surprise. I thought you was just some one of the officers —"

"Oh, for God's sake, Nance, don't say that again — don't say it!" the young man burst out, almost with a sob. The cabin, the camp-fire, the serene forest, Darnell with his

rifle, the girl in her red cotton frock — old, old scenes and memories rushed upon him; he felt a kind of agony of weak compassion, miserable and helpless regret. Of the two, this poor painted, bedecked, and not penitent Magdalen was by far the more composed — or, perhaps, whatever her real emotion, she concealed it with the drilled and painful duplicity of women. She looked at him silently without either embarrassment or defiance. I suppose Mrs. Ducey would have called her utterly shameless; yet no manner could have been less brazen, farther removed from what is commonly figured as that of the courtesan. She seemed, after the first instant, to have accepted the situation, and to expect Burke to accept it with a like philosophy. At the time of her father's death she had betrayed something of the same distorted fatalism — to call it that — and the girl of five or six years ago was strangely visible in the woman of to-day. Whatever Nance's faults, dishonesty was not one of them; when Nathan asked her what she was doing, she answered with as much plainness of speech and manner (more, indeed, than it has been possible to convey here) as a woman ever employs towards a man — too plainly, at least, to be misinterpreted. He had known her since both of them could remember, a brother could not have been nearer to her; one ready lie might have made all smooth, so many men and most women would have thought — and she never thought to utter it. The only alternative that occurred to her was that of running away; and that chance lost, she knew no devices to spare herself, and asked for no quarter.

They stood looking at each other for a long minute in silence; then, as she turned slowly away, Nathan followed her with a gesture. "Nance, where are you going?"

"Home, I guess. Back where I live, I mean."

He fell into step by her side. "You are living here?"

"Yes."

"Where?" asked Burke, aware of some subtle change in her manner; she began to walk so hurriedly he had to lengthen his stride to keep up with her. And at the last question she hesitated perceptibly before answering: —

"It's — it's up the street — off there. It's a good ways —"

"I'll go with you — I want to see you —" Burke was beginning, when, to his bewilderment, she stopped short.

cowering away as if he had offered to strike her. They had left the zone of lamplight, and he could see her face only imperfectly in the dusk, but there was no mistaking her attitude of almost frenzied repugnance and entreaty. She clasped and wrung her hands together, her voice came in a kind of hoarse shriek. "Oh, Nat, Nat Burke — not *you!* Oh, *please*, Nathan, oh, *please* go away, oh, *please* go back —" she began to cry, with long shuddering gasps like a child.

"Go away?" repeated Nathan, puzzled and moved and, in fact, rather frightened. "Why? What for? Don't cry that way, Nance, don't — you'll hurt yourself. Do you think I care what kind of a place you live in? Don't you want me to see it? I — I just wanted to know how — how it happened. If you'd rather not talk to me — if you'd rather I didn't know — if it's too hard for you to tell me, you know — I'll go away. Only you know nothing you could do or say or — or *be* could make any difference in the way I've always felt about you — you believe that, don't you? Lord Almighty knows I'm not so good I can set myself up to judge people!" said the young fellow, awkwardly enough, but in all earnestness and humility. He was afraid lest something he had said or left unsaid, in the pain and confusion of their meeting, might have seemed to her an assumption of the judge's attitude — than which nothing could have been farther from his mind. Let him that is without sin cast the first stone.

The words seemed to quiet her; her sobs and ejaculations ceased at last. "I guess I'm kind of half crazy, Nat," she said brokenly; "I might have known *you* wouldn't want — but I've — I've got to thinking of that the first thing — I — I can't help it, Nathan. I've just got into that way of thinking. A person does, you know - - a woman, I mean — that — that lives the way I do. You can't get away from it — it's just like all the men was brutes — and the women, too, for that matter. There don't seem to be anything else — only just *that.* People don't know —" and a great deal more in the same incoherent and hysterical strain which Burke put down to overwrought nerves and a shattered body, as he walked by her side and listened to her. He could make nothing sensible out of it at the time, except that she seemed to think she must apologize for her seizure; and it

was not until long afterwards, in recalling this conversation, every word of which he will remember to his dying day, that comprehension came slowly to him — with a wretched shame and self-abasement — of what the poor thing meant, of what she had momentarily supposed him capable.

The house where Nance lived was in one of the water-side streets — I have forgot the name, if indeed I ever noticed it — with another pulque-shop under the corner, "La Lluvia de Oro" this time — a name in which one might discern a ghastly appropriateness — whence issued a one-eyed and dreadfully pock-marked wretch who opened the heavy wooden doors into the patio with many leers, winks, and nods; and — Burke having given him a piece of money for performing this office — called unprintable good wishes after the couple as they ascended the stone steps. At the stair-head a fat hag, hanging over the iron balustrade, doubtless to take stock of the prey her foragers had brought in, bestowed a cataloguing glance on the officer; and presently after a servant came with champagne to the door of the room. There was no lack of feasting and drinking, laughter and music, and gaudy decorations within those accursed walls. Nance told Burke she had been there for two weeks. She had come with a party of — of actors.

"What! You were with those people?" Nathan cried out. "Why, I saw them — I saw them pass in their steamboat. I was standing on the docks down at Camp Belknap — down at the river mouth."

"I know," said Nance, nodding; "that was the people. But I didn't see you, Nat. Maybe I was in the cabin. I don't know that I'd have known you unless I was close to, anyhow. You look a lot older, and then being in uniform changes a man's looks. I didn't know you was with the army. Them people I was with, they ain't actors — them women ain't — there's pretty near all of 'em in this house right now. They ain't any more actors than I am. We'd come over from N'Orleans because of the army being here. They was two men brought the lot."

"Where had you been before that?"

"Why in N'Orleans in a — house there, you know. Oh, you mean before *that?* Why, I don't know — everywheres I guess — ever so many places — *I* had, anyway. Don't

you want some champagne, Nathan? Oh, well, you needn't to, then, if you don't want." She put the bottle down with a miserable reluctance. "I —I drink some — I drink about as much as Pap useter, Nat, — I — you get to doing it, you know — you can't help yourself —"

"I understand," said Nat, unhappily,

"I like the taste, though — at least I did to begin with. You know Pap didn't care nothing about how it tasted. But I don't reckon he'd ever drunk any champagne. It kind of fixes you up when you ain't feeling good. And I ain't feeling good a good part of the time, Nathan. I'm tired. When you're that way, you've *got* to have something. It don't last, of course; nothing lasts, I guess," she finished musingly.

Burke thought with a pang of sorrowful apprehension as he sat looking at her that this dreary aphorism might well apply to poor Nance's own term of days in a world which had not treated her too kindly. She was very thin, and as he now began to notice, coughed with a slight persistent cough; her features had sharpened to a kind of hard delicacy, there was a hollow at either temple where the blue vein stood out distressingly; in this moment of repose she looked quite old — old and haggard — yet she was a year younger than himself. She sat in a sibyl-like attitude with her black drapery, her white and tinted face, her chin in one hand, her gloomy eyes fixed — alas! — on the tin-foiled bottle of wine. The lamp on the table threw a dingy halo about her; it could not conquer the shadows of the high, cold, shabbily gorgeous room, and Nance's slender figure in a garish travesty of the Mexican costume, all flaring colors, fringes, and paste jewelry, made the young man think of the last flame leaping red and vivid upon some dim ash-heap. A little longer and that unstable fire would flicker out in the awful darkness that awaits both saint and sinner.

"Where did you go, Nance, when you — you went away first, you know?" he asked. "I hunted for you high and low, as soon as I heard about — about what had happened. But that wasn't till a month afterwards."

"I knew you was hunting, — knew it all the time. I hid. I didn't want you to find me," she answered apathetically.

"You hid? From me?"

"Yes, I hid. What good would it have done your finding me? By that time, anyhow? Lots of people could have told you, only they wouldn't — you might have knowed they wouldn't. They ain't any use trying to find out anything from 'em. That old White-Hat Sam, he could have told you for one. 'Most everybody around where he lived in them houses — houses like this — knew, but they weren't going to tell. They never tell anything. 'Twasn't any use your asking. Is White-Hat Sam alive yet, Nathan?"

"I don't know whether he is or not, the villain — the —— old villain," Burke said, groaning out a curse in his helpless pain and anger.

She looked at him evidently surprised. "Why, what are you down on poor old White-Hat for? He was real good to me. Oh, you think he — he *led me astray*, like the preachers say? Well, he didn't, Nat; I did it myself —"

"Nance!"

"I did it myself, I tell you. Nobody could 'a' made me if I hadn't chosen — why, you *know* that, Nat Burke. What are you looking so for?" she demanded savagely. "Are you thinking about Pap? Don't you s'pose *I've* thought about him? He'd have shot me with his old gun that he's lying buried with — he'd have choked me to death with his two hands ruther than see me this way — in this place. Don't you s'pose I know that? Just the same I did it of my own free will and accord; there ain't nobody to blame — that is — unless —" she turned her eyes, which she had kept steadily on the lamp during the last part of this speech, towards the young man with a movement of sudden violence. "Nathan!" she said in a voice of desperate, of heart-rending appeal; "Nathan, I never stole that breastpin, I never stole it, I never touched it. You believe that, don't you? Nathan, I never lied in my life. You *know* I didn't take it, you *know* I didn't take it."

"Why, of course, I know you didn't, Nance. I never thought for a minute that you took it," said Burke, vigorously.

She went on, hardly heeding him, with wild gestures, trembling all over her poor weak frame. "Why, what would I have wanted with it, a thing like that? I couldn't wear it — I couldn't sell it — even if I wasn't honest — just put

it that way — just say I wasn't honest — why, I still had too much *sense* to take it. She might know that, seems to me. There was a dozen things in the house I could have took any time, if I'd wanted — if I'd been that kind. Why didn't I take her money? I'd had plenty of chances. She wouldn't have missed it as quick and I could have spent money." She stopped abruptly, looking at Burke with a tortured face. "I can't help it, Nat — I get to going over and over it that way sometimes when I'm by myself. I'll go crazy yet, I guess — if I don't die first."

"I know how it was. I went to Mrs. Ducey when I heard. But I couldn't make her think any differently. I guess I did more harm than good," said Nat, sadly. "I've often wished since that I had — had gone to see you, and — and — why, I might have made it kind of easier for you, Nance, I believe, knowing all about Mrs. Ducey the way I did —"

"Why, I don't know what *you* could have done, Nathan," said Nance, simply; "person's got to live their own life, and get along the best they can, you know. Mrs. Ducey's a good enough woman. Lord, I ain't holding it up against her, what she done — except times when I get mad at her, thinking about it, like I did just now. 'Twasn't *right*, Nat. 'Twasn't *fair*. But there! People can't be any better than they're smart enough to be. It was hard — it was hard. I was just a wild sort of fool girl, you know, Nathan. Why, I thought Mrs. Ducey was just an angel from heaven — I'd always been kind of crazy about her. I remember Pap laughing at me about that. And it *was* good of her, it was a kind, good thing to do to take me and try to make something out of me. She could have done it, she could have done it, Nat, if she'd went at it different — I was ready to lie down and let her walk over me. It's kind of pitiful to think how I felt about her. And she *was* just as kind to me as she knew how — but, my God, Nathan Burke, that ain't no way to be kind to people, like they was *dogs*. You've got to be kind to 'em like they was men and women. Soon's I found out how it was, I wanted to pay her back for her kindness — understand? I'd have gone back to the farm, or got another job somewheres, only I wanted for her to get some use out of me, s'long's she thought she was doing so much for me — I wanted to be worth my keep to her. Pap wouldn't have had me beholden

to nobody. Hadn't been for that I wouldn't have stayed after the first two-three months. Nathan, I done my very best. I worked hard — I tried to do the way she wanted — I tried to please her — I couldn't stand that boy of hers — I never heard of anybody that could — but I done my best. And Mr. Ducey is a real kind man, too, Nat. I guess you know that. He ain't smart, but he means well. He sorter stood up for me 'bout the breastpin — but it didn't do any good." She had to pause in a paroxysm of coughing. Nathan, listening, was conscious only of pity when I suppose the knowledge of what Nance had become, of the depths to which she had fallen in spite of the opportunities she had had to rise, ought to have filled him with horror and aversion. Not one good, or, as the phrase goes, honest woman on earth would have spoken to her — would have touched her with a pair of tongs! — much less sympathized with her. Yet to his perverted view, she was not wholly blamable, wholly corrupt. She was willing; she was reasonable; she had the root, at least, of humanity and justice, he thought. And that she plainly felt the disgrace of imputed theft so keenly, and the disgrace of her present position not at all, was one of those contradictions which are still, someway, somehow, perfectly comprehensible.

She went on, prompted by a question now and then, but for the most part talking with a freedom that probably relieved her. After being turned away from Governor Gwynne's, she had found another place only to be discharged again in about a week's time. Her story seemed to be common property by this, and dogged her unerringly. It was the kitchen-and-backstairs-gossip of the whole town. "Them things get around like everything, Nat," she said, without any show of anger or resentment, however; rather as stating a curious and noteworthy fact. "I reckon Mrs. Ducey thought she never told anybody — I guess she didn't *mean* to — but it's awful easy for stories like that to get started and keep going and getting worse as they go. All them servants at Gwynne's knew, and of course they told their friends and *they* told — and so it went. "Nance Darnell? Why, she's the girl that stole a lady's breastpin, or diamond necklace, or trunkful of gold dollars, or Lord knows what!" One place the lady said she'd heard 'bout me

stealing that solid silver tea-service, and she was surprised my showing my face in an honest person's house. The last place I was in — 'twas a boarding-house — was kep' by a big, fat woman with an awful tongue, but she was kinder than some. I stayed there a little longer than at most all of the other places. She came in the kitchen the second day I was there, and when she got a chanst, when there wasn't nobody else round, she says, kind of looking at me hard: 'Ain't you the Darnell girl that there's such a rowdy-dow about?' I said, 'Yes, I am.' She sort of waited for a minute and when I didn't say anything, she says: 'Well, speak up, can't you? What have you got to say?' I said, 'I ain't got anything to say, Mrs. Doane; I'll leave just as soon as I get these dishes washed up.' 'I didn't say for you to go,' she says, still just as rough as could be. 'I want you to tell me 'bout it. I don't b'lieve all the stories I hear passed around,' she says. 'Seems to me they make out like you done too much. If you was as bad as they say, you'd 'a' been in the Pen long ago. Now you tell me your side.' So I told her. She sat and studied awhile, then she says: 'Well, Nance, I guess you can stay here. I guess I'll risk you.' Nathan, I done what I never done before, and I ain't hardly ever done since, but when she said that, I begun to cry. She was real good, that woman was.

"All the same, Nat, you know it wouldn't do — you know how things are. In a little the boarders got to knowing about me, and then every time one of 'em missed a shoe-button — don't you see? Mrs. Doane come and told me herself, and she felt bad because she — she believed in me, and she wanted to help me. 'But Nance,' she says, ''tain't any use. If any of 'em should lose something, they'd blame it on you right off. They'd say you took it if it couldn't be found; and if it *was* found, they'd say you put it back because you was scairt. I can't help it — I got to let you go — I hate to — it's a dog-mean thing to do — but it's my bread-and-butter, you know. I've got to live, and I got to keep this boarding-house, and I can't have the people feeling that way. But,' she says,' I'm going to give you a letter to a friend of mine that lives over to Newark, and she'll take you in and give you a place in her house, and nobody knows anything about you over there, nor they don't need

to know!' She give me a dollar, too, Nat, when I went away. And she didn't have much either, pore woman — it's a dog's life, keeping boarders."

Nance paused again; and a great gust of laughter, men's and women's voices together, the screaking of a fiddle, and a dog yelping in a melancholy cadence at some door not far distant, broke in upon them. Burke doubted if his companion heard it; she sat silent for so long even after the noise had died down that he at last said, "So then you went to Newark?"

She started, looked at him with a vague smile, and shook her head. "No, I didn't go, Nat. I could 'a' gone, of course; and mebbe I'd 'a' got into some good people's home — mebbe. You can't tell. Mebbe it would have been the same thing over again, I didn't feel's if I could stand any more of that. I was tired-like. There ain't much a girl can do with a thing like that sort of hanging over her the everlasting time, you know. You can't get away from it if you're a girl like a man can. Man can pick up and go anywheres a thousand mile off — yes, you could go barefoot, and sleep in a haystack, and work your way on a keel-boat, and nobody wouldn't think anything of it, nor pay no 'tention to how you did. But a *girl* all alone — first thing folks want to know is who is she, and where'd she come from and what was she doing the last place she was at? Seems funny, a girl can't begin to do half the harm a man can, and people are ever so much more scared of her! I said thanky to Mrs. Doane, and I went away and I ain't never seen her since. I s'pose she thinks I wasn't any good after all, an' a thief spite of everything I tried to make her b'lieve.

"At first I wasn't quite certain but what I'd go to Newark. Only I'd had to walk, you know, because I didn't have no money for to hire a seat in the coach; and Newark's a good piece off, sixty or seventy mile I reckon. I remember it was kind of freezin' weather with slush on top of the ice — 'twas in January. I remember thinking 'bout how it was getting along towards Miss Gwynne's wedding-day; I'd heard 'em say how she was to be married sometime in January. 'Twasn't extra good weather for a bride. I walked around a good while kind of planning and studying 'bout Newark — I had to walk the street, you know — I

didn't have nowhere to go. They was a place I'd gone to before in between whiles when I didn't have a job, but the woman she told me she didn't have no room for me this time, and I knew 'twas because she'd heard, and she didn't keer for to have me in the house. She knew my name — I never lied to anybody 'bout it. I just walked 'round. Sometimes I'd go into a store and set by the stove and warm myself for a spell; but I didn't like to much, because I didn't have but a dollar-seventy-five — my wages and what Mrs. Doane give me — and I couldn't buy anything, and the young men they had clerking would come and ask me what I wanted, and when I said I didn't want nothing, they'd look kind of queer. And I got a notion mebbe some of 'em knew 'bout me. If they did, they'd be scairt I'd take something, and I thought they watched me pretty close. Seems like I must 'a' walked miles and miles that day — pretty nigh enough to get me to Newark, if I'd started that way, I wouldn't wonder. Then first you know it come dark — the days is awful short, you know, in winter — and there I was, and all to oncet I remembered I hadn't et nothing since morning. I'd been thinking so hard I hadn't noticed where I was going, but when I looked up 'twas Water Street. It's a quiet-looking street in day-time, you know. I set down on a doorstep."

"You didn't know what kind of a —"

"Yes, I did, Nathan," she said patiently; "I told you before — I knew all about what I was doing. I knew just what kind of a name the street had. I was plumb tired out, and it was dark — blind-man's holiday, you know — so's nobody could see me very well, and if they did, what difference would it make? Them people wouldn't care, nor me neither. I set there, and I b'lieve I must have dozed off, for all to oncet I felt somebody take me by the shoulder and give me a shake, only not rough, you know, just a right smart shake to wake me up, and says: 'Say, what you doing here? What's the matter of you? Get up!' When I got good and waked up, I see it was a woman, all dressed to kill, with a bunnit on with feathers, and a long gold chain and watch, and a fur cape and muff — sables, they was — and a laylock-colored silk dress; she was painted, too; I could see her face because somebody had opened the door, and the hall-lamp was lit and shining

straight on her. She wasn't very young — she had a false front. They was elegant chairs and things in the hall, too. I said, 'Ma'am, was I asleep?' sort of dumb like. For a minute I couldn't remember where I was. 'Asleep!' she says; 'well, I reckon you was, and sound too. Y'ain't drunk. What you setting there for? You don't b'long here.' I ast her if it was her house. She says: 'Yes, it's mine. Who you looking for?' 'Nobody,' I says; 'I ain't got anywhere to go, that's all, so I just set down on your step for to rest. I didn't know whose house it was. I didn't mean to go to sleep.' 'Well, I should hope not,' says the woman. 'You'd 'a' froze to death in an hour or so. What you mean by you ain't got anywhere to go? Where's your folks?' I told her I didn't have none. 'My God, you ain't got *anybody?*' she says. And then kinder sudden: 'Here, turn 'round to the light. Let's look at you!' They was two-three more women some of 'em dressed up and some in frowsy double-gowns come out of the doors into the hall, and looking and listening by that time. She looked at me for a spell, and then says: 'You're a right nice-looking girl, my dear, to be out like this, lying 'round on doorsteps in the cold. Where's your friend, you know? Mebbe I know him.' I said, 'I ain't got any friend, ma'am.' She kinder laughed, and said: 'Oh, I know all about that. I mean your gentleman friend, you know. Was you looking for him? I know a lot of gentlemen, and I wouldn't wonder if I've met him. What's his name? You needn't be afraid of me, my dear.' I kept on saying I hadn't any friend like that, so at last she said: 'Well, never mind, if you don't want to tell. You can just come inside anyhow, and get warm.' So I went in."

Nance stopped; she got up to adjust the lamp which had begun to smoke, and resumed her seat, absently stroking down the folds of her skirt. She raised her eyes and met the young man's expectant face with a shadowy surprise, and then comprehension.

"I went in, Nat," she repeated with a kind of gentle distinctness. "That's all. There ain't any more to tell. I went in."

There was another very long silence.

"They hounded you out of their houses. And you were cold and starving," Burke contrived to say at last. She made a slight negative gesture.

"You want to make out like I couldn't help it. But nobody made me do it — I done it myself, just like I've been telling you. I *was* cold and hungry, but I guess I could 'a' made out a little longer, only — the other was easier, I 'spose. It's kinder hard for you to understand, I guess, Nathan, but — why, women ain't near so good as men think they are, nor as they think they are theirselves. Women like Mrs. Ducey now, they just don't *want* to know 'bout 'emselves right deep down — they'd be as mad as fury if anybody told 'em the truth. But it's this way 'bout men and women: a man's got to work or die — that's all there is about it. But a woman down in the bottom of her heart she's always thinking — yes, even if she don't know it, she's thinking just the same — 'Well, if the worst comes to the worst, there's always a way for me!' If you're Mrs. Ducey's kind, you just marry somebody; if you ain't — if you're like me, why —. There it is. And as for being *wrong*, that never stopped 'em yet. It's what people will think and the way they may get treated stops 'em. There wasn't anybody on earth caring for me, and that made it easier still — but I might 'a' done it anyhow. Only I didn't want you to know, Nat; I hoped you'd never know."

"I don't see why you didn't come to me to begin with."

She looked at him with an expression that strikingly reproduced that which he had seen on a dozen other female faces whenever he had attempted to explain his interest in Nance Darnell. "That wouldn't have done any good, Nathan. Can't you *see* that? It don't do any good for a girl to go to a young man when she's in trouble — it only makes it worse. And you couldn't have persuaded Mrs. Ducey any different, anyhow. You said that yourself."

"Well, I can help you now surely, Nance," said Burke, earnestly. "Look here, I've — I've got plenty of money, you know. I've done pretty well. And I'm just the same as your brother. You'd take it from me, wouldn't you? I want you to get out of this place. You can go somewhere, and — and live quietly, and nobody need ever know anything about your — your life. We'll find some little quiet place — something nice that you'll like, and — and you can have everything you want, and — and — and —"

"And keep straight?" said Nance. She eyed him with a

wistful smile in which there was something almost maternally affectionate and forbearing. "It's good of you to think of that, Nathan — it's just like you — it's good of you. And I don't believe you've got such a power of money either," she interpolated acutely. "But you can't do it — you can't take care of me."

"Why can't I?"

"Because of what people would say, that's why. S'pose anybody'd seen you with me, or coming in here? What'd they think?"

"They could say and think what they pleased," said Burke, impatiently. "I guess I can stand it. Do let me, Nance. Let me for my own sake. It would make me kind of square with myself. I've always felt as if I hadn't acted right — as if I hadn't done all I could for you. And I promised your father I'd take care of you. It's just as if you were my sister — I wouldn't be ashamed to be seen anywhere with you, Nance. You believe that, don't you?"

He spoke with warmth, and, as he believed, honestly. Nance did not answer for a moment; then she said, irrelevantly, "Are you married, Nat?"

"N-no," said the young fellow, startled, and feeling the color rise in his face. She turned her searching gaze on him.

"Engaged? Yes? To one of those girls at home? Which one? What's her name?"

Burke stammered in a hideous confusion; his face was on fire; he could not meet her steady black eyes, he could not look at her. He thought he would have given a year out of his life to have been able to force himself to the words; but he could not. His head sank down on his breast, as he called himself inwardly a coward and a brute.

"You see," said Nance, in a final tone, "you can't even make yourself say her name in this house — in this room — to me. You can't do it. That's the way a man feels about his wife and his sister, Nat."

"Nance — I — I —"

"That's what your not being ashamed and not caring amounts to, you see," said Nance — not at all reproachfully, but with that same air of detached and impersonal observation which, except in a rare moment or two of excitement, she had maintained throughout this interview.

"Nance!" said Burke, miserably; "I — oh, forgive me — I —" he fairly put his face in his hands; He could have shed tears of shame and pain and helpless anger at himself.

"Why, Lord, I'm not blaming you, Nathan. Don't feel so bad. You meant it when you said it, only you didn't stop to think. And you want to do for me. But I can't go back and be a — a — be like I was; no more can you feel 'bout me 's if I'd always been — kept straight. 'Tain't in natur'. You couldn't even me up with your wife — you couldn't let your wife know anything 'bout me. You think you wouldn't mind for anybody to know that you was taking care of me — but would you *tell* anybody? You might swear yourself black in the face, and would anybody believe you that it was — it was all right? I ain't going to spoil your life that way, Nat — I won't let you spoil it."

It was not easy to move her from this position; and strange now to Burke to reflect that a character so strong or, at least so decided, should ever have committed so sadly irremediable an error; and, having committed it and entered upon the dark Avernian way, should still possess something of its ancient force, undefiled and unweakened. Yet Burke did not leave her until he had partially at any rate won his point; he made her take enough money to provide for her actual wants — more she absolutely refused — and wrung a promise from her to see him within a few days when he hoped to get leave to visit Matamoros again. Day was breaking as he left the place; the dogs were slinking away from the offal-heaps; there were natives stirring about the streets with their blankets up about their eyes, with their sandalled feet. He found the house in the Calle Guanajuato where the porter had already unbarred the doors; and rolled up in his soldier's overcoat and slept on a bench for an hour until the reveille, sounding far and sweet across the river at Fort Brown, awoke him.

CHAPTER IV

Alarums. Excursions

All the while that Captain Burke's small affairs were being transacted, and while our gradually increasing army lay at the Brazos, at Camp Belknap, at Burito, sweltering and shivering by turns, bragging, squabbling, drilling, skylarking, contracting dysentery, camp-fever, and a dozen other ills — making trial, in a word, of the pleasures and hardships incident to the paths of glory — all this while history was marching forward, and those tolerably weighty events were coming to pass which you may read about to-day, set forth in a single short paragraph of Johnny's school-book. The young gentleman himself considers it pretty dull stuff, I dare say; although he is a well-meaning boy, he can hardly keep awake to memorize it. I never yet fell in with a pupil of any grade from Primary up to the closing year of High School who knew a thing in the world about the Mexican War, or, to tell the dismal truth, cared. Why should they? The most of us took very little interest in our adversary, and felt no slightest enmity towards him, even in the heat of the quarrel. It is all over these forty years; we have forgot it in the stress of our own private troubles. The widows and orphans of '46–'47 have passed, or are passing with their generation; the battlefields are grown up in "chaparral," for what I know. We have made friends with the Republic across the Rio Grande, and it is a good thing to wipe the slate clean. Even General Burke (Bvt.), who prides himself on a ready and accurate memory, and who thought he could recall in detail everything of importance that took place during those years, was astonished to find, upon taking up *our* little fellow's book the other day, how far astray were his vaunted recollections. Such is a young man's absorption in his own personal concerns, that while, as has been seen, Burke remembers most vividly and faithfully what

happened under his own eye and touched him nearly, he is quite incapable of a general view, as one might call it, of the great events of the day. For an excuse it ought to be noted that the news we got in camp, whether full or scanty, was alike perfectly unreliable and contradictory, now for peace, now for war, now bloody and terrible, now merely inane. A score of armies of our size could not have performed the manœuvres General Taylor was credited with projecting; nor could a score of General Taylors have been in the different places he was supposed to be, or said the different things fathered upon him. We wearied of this mad gossip; we cared more about letters from home than for the whole tribe of Presidents, Cabinets, and Generals.[1] Supposing Ampudia *were* advancing from Monterey to overwhelm us? The report might or might not be true — we knew for a certainty that the baby had cut a tooth. Say we *were* to march on Monterey to-morrow — and what of that? The south field had yielded thirty bushels to the acre, by thunder! It was towards the end of August, I think, that we got the news — true for once! — of another revolution in that unfortunate country we were come to conquer. Paredes was a prisoner; Gomez Farias had been declared provisional president; Santa Anna was again at the head of the army. Santa Anna! Maybe we'd have some fighting *now!* Men, remember the Alamo! Captain Burke was not one-half so interested in this report as in the dire fact that our mail from the States had been lost, or the carriers attacked, robbed, and murdered on the road.

Before and during the five or six weeks when the volunteers were arriving, some detachments of regular troops under Colonel Garland, Lieutenant-colonel Wilson, and others had advanced up the river and into the country; and were now occupying the Mexican towns of Reynosa, Mier, Camargo, and various scattered outposts which had been surrendered to them with little or no resistance. Many times, it was said, the village would clear out, bag and baggage, officers and men, padre, alcalde, citizens, dogs, and donkeys, upon

[1] I remember being told in this connection by the officer in charge of our regimental mail that fully nine-tenths of the men's letters were addressed to women. — N. B.

our approach — a proceeding which naturally increased that feeling of contempt which already filled the breast of every right-minded volunteer. Perhaps the regulars could have corrected some of our notions; but these gentry came and went with an air of attending strictly to their own business, seldom foregathering with the militia, and evidently in expectation that the brunt of the fighting would fall to them — as, indeed, in some instances it did. I have seen a hard, silent, experienced old sergeant — who, by-the-way, kept his accoutrements in better order, his quarters cleaner, and himself infinitely more comfortable than the smartest of our volunteers, without nearly so much trouble — I have seen one of these standing by or lounging on a bench, listening with something like a smile on his leathery old countenance to a squad of lads, the Arkansas, Pennsylvania, or Kentucky Infantry, very likely, mowing down whole regiments of Mexicans in prospective, enacting prodigies of valor, and "conquering a peace" — which was the catchword of those days — with hardly a blow from the other side. "Don't the Mexicans *ever* fight?" Burke one day asked a veteran of this class. He saluted, "Yes, sir," he said — and that was *all* he said. Lieutenant Ridgely (being pressed) had been overheard to admit that it was "pretty hot" at Palo Alto; and some one told Burke that the "Garda Costa" battalion, recruited at Tampico, had fought "like devils," and out of their whole number, two hundred and fifty, had left two hundred on the field. Nevertheless, amongst the thousand-and-one rumors that sped about the camp, the only one that never gained credence was that which attributed a particle of courage and spirit to our enemy.

Lieutenant Ducey, a prodigious fire-eater, as we have seen, never lost an opportunity of expressing his impatience to be on the move against these poltroons; it would have been a war of extermination if George had had his way; and I believe he considered our general's just and merciful policy towards the natives as a mere exhibition of the latent weakness of Taylor's character. "Perfectly absurd, Burke, perfect Tom-foolishness, this pampering of the Mexicans, and effort to conciliate them — 'order . . . all his command to observe with the most scrupulous respect the rights of the inhabitants who may be found in peaceful prosecution of their occupa-

tions' — and all the rest of it," said George, quoting from those famous field orders of the general's, with high scorn and indignation. "Aren't we in a conquered country, I'd like to know —"

"Not quite conquered yet, George," said Burke, with a laugh, as he stropped his razor.

"Pooh, just as good as conquered. *Rights*, hey? These people haven't any rights — any that civilized warfare would take any notice of, anyway. They aren't fit for rights — they couldn't run the government to save 'em. And here's another place where he says: 'Whatever may be needed for the use of the army will be bought . . . and paid for at the highest prices.' The idea of having that printed in Spanish and English and circulating it all over the country! It fairly offers a prize to the Mexican who can stick us for the most money. Why, Taylor don't seem to know the first *thing* about war! He ought to subsist the army by foraging; he ought just to take what he wants wherever he can find it. That's the way to carry on *war*. And that's what Secretary Marcy wants him to do anyhow; the War Department's told him so over and over again — don't do any good, he just bulls right ahead his own way. It's my opinion Taylor's not the brightest man in the world, Burke, not — not a *heavyweight*, you know. He's throwing away Uncle Sam's money, that's what he's doing — spending money that ain't his, by jingo! I've got my opinion about any man that'll do that!" said the severe George, who certainly could not be accused of encouraging the Mexicans in their extortionate practices by any particular free-handedness on his own part. As usual it was impossible to say what became of George's money, yet he was chronically out of pocket and in debt. And he now added, after a moment of silence in which he sat on the edge of Burke's camp-cot, watching the latter gentleman shave himself by a little tin-like mirror suspended from the ridge-pole of the tent, "Say, you got any money, Nat?"

"I guess so — some — not very much," said Burke, tooling carefully around his chin. He had, in fact, parted with all he could conveniently spare to his poor friend at Matamoros, and had been calculating on the arrival of pay-day, due, we understood, in a week or so, with a rather abnormal impatience. [Perhaps, in justice to both young men, it

should be noted here that, owing to departmental inexperience or incompetency, the pay of our troops throughout this war was very delayed, irregular, and uncertain. I recall one period of eight months when the men were without their wages. And whereas the sensible, and one would suppose the natural, course would have been to send us gold, we received on more than one occasion drafts which we were obliged to cash, at a ruinous discount, with some blood-sucking native money-changer.]

(This note seems to have been written at some later date than the rest of the manuscript and is on a separate sheet of paper, pasted in. M. S. W.)

"How much do you need?" Burke asked him.

"Oh, I don't know — fifteen or twenty dollars, just to last till I get my pay," said George, who knew, and knew that Burke knew, that his pay was already anticipated to the last penny. "*I — guess — you — can — let — me — have — it, Nathan, hey?*" he finished in a voice so charged with meaning, and a manner so nearly verging on the peremptory, that the captain turned his face from the mirror, and looked down upon him, puzzled.

"I'll pay you back the minute I get my money, of course — you know that, of course, Nat," George cried, more humbly this time, and shrinking from the other's eyes.

"Do you owe anybody?" said Burke, asking his invariable question. "If you do, bring me the bill, or tell me who the fellow is, and I'll settle with him if I can. But I tell you flat I'm not going to let you have any more money to fool away — I can't afford it. You'll have to hunt up somebody else to borrow from. I don't know what you do with it, but you ought to have more backbone than to borrow this way all the time, and then keep these poor devils of Mexicans waiting for their wretched little dribs. There's that fellow in the Rifles — that Kentucky man — what's his name? Burnham? — have you paid him yet? He told me himself, he thinks we're cousins. Told me you borrowed of him to buy a Mexican saddle and bridle, all over silver stuff. What do yo' want with a thing like that? You haven't any horse. It's time you grew up, George, and got some sense of responsibility. You're a good ways off from your mother and father now, and you've got to strike out for yourself. How do you

suppose they'd like it if they knew you were running in debt and getting behind this way right along?" He lectured his subordinate as if George had been a child indeed; he was tired of these petty demands — tired of explaining that Lieutenant Ducey was no kin to him; the impossibility of talking to George as man to man all at once seemed to him exasperating.

The young fellow sat sulkily looking down at his beautifully polished boots; he was spick and span as customary; a splendid fragrance of pomatum floated up from his waved and shining black locks. What was going on underneath that painstaking coiffure? Or what agitating the set of faculties that did duty for a soul within that squeezed, padded, tailored body? After two or three false starts, he said, not looking at Burke, in a tone strangely shaken by fright or vexation or both. "You can just leave my father and mother out of it, Mr. Nathan Burke, if you please. It's no business of yours what they think about me. You think just because you've known me all my life you can preach at me all you want. You're a nice person to *preach*, *you* are!"

"If you know *me* well enough to keep asking me for money, you know me well enough to take what I've got to say about it," retorted the captain, epigrammatically.

"You'd better look at home a little, seems to me, before you're so damn quick about telling other people how they ought to be. What'd they think about me, hey? What'd they think about *you* at home, if they knew?"

"If they knew? If they knew what?"

"Oh, pretend you don't understand, of course, do! Innocence!" said George, sneering faintly with a ghastly and ashen face. He was really terrified, although, Heaven knows, Burke had no idea of intimidating him. It was not possible to take George's feeble tantrums seriously. The captain hardly listened to him, hardly noticed him; he was used to these bursts of spite and nervousness.

"I don't know what you're talking about, George," he said, gathering up his shaving tools; "I mean what I say, and I'm not alluding to your family in any disrespectful way. If they —"

"If they knew about you and that Darnell girl — that Nance Darnell, I guess you wouldn't be quite so high and

mighty. How'd you like to have everybody at home know *that*, hey?" shrieked George, desperately. He started up, cowering back as if he expected a blow.

But Burke was thinking of no such thing. For an instant he was too surprised at this sudden revelation of George's acquaintance with his movements and affairs to speak, or do anything but stare blankly. Yet after all why should George not know — why should anybody not know? He had made no effort at concealment. Had he hoped in his inmost heart that nobody ever would find out? The other began to breathe less rapidly, even to assume a certain air of commanding the situation when he observed the captain's confusion. For Nat *was* confused; a hundred emotions besieged him — regret — pity for Nance — an angry contempt no less for himself than for George — uneasy anticipation — the pained consciousness that this was the very thing the poor woman had foreseen and warned him of, in her bitter intuition that their connection could not be explained without blame.

"Begin to feel a little differently about it now, I guess?" said George, superbly insolent and secure. Nathan made an abrupt movement — he was only reassembling his brushes and razors — and the other jumped back a foot or more, in a panic, clutching and feeling for his side-arms which, fortunately, had been laid elsewhere, and were out of his reach. Burke could have laughed at another time.

"Don't be a fool, George," he said. "I'm not going to hurt you. What is all this talk? What do you know about Nance Darnell?"

What George knew, or thought he knew, may be imagined; it appeared he had seen the two of them together in Matamoros, on the occasion of Burke's second visit there, had tracked Nance to "La Lluvia de Oro," and after some inquiries, had drawn his own conclusions — natural enough in the circumstances, Burke owned inwardly. A great deal more which never happened at all the young gentleman supplied out of his own fervid fancy; and it occurred to Burke with a vivid irony that George might possibly protest too much. He was a very naïve, high-colored, and inconsequent liar; and had not the wit to know that the plain truth of what he had seen would serve him better and be far

more deadly unadorned. Nat himself offered no denials or explanations, listening without a word; and I dare say it would take a wiser man than George Ducey to distinguish between innocent silence and guilty silence. I believe in my soul we all see what we want to see, even the best disposed of us, and close our eyes to the rest. George, at any rate, was cock-sure of his inferences.

"Guess you think differently about some little matters *now*, hey, Burke?" he repeated significantly, after a minute or two of this mute reflection on both sides. Nathan looked up inquiringly, meeting his eyes, and this time George did not flinch. His face took on an indescribable expression at once confident and wary. "You wouldn't much want the home folks to know about it, would you?" he suggested. "You wouldn't want Mary Sharpless to know, I guess." And after a slight pause, "Got any money, Nat?"

Burke smote himself a blow on the knee in a sudden illumination. "*By — the — Lord!*" he exclaimed aloud. "Don't jump out of your skin, George. I told you I wouldn't hurt you. It's only that I couldn't make out for a minute what you were driving at — and I see it now! The idea is that if I pay you, you won't tell on me — isn't that it?"

"Why — I — er — that is — yes — only, of course —" George stammered, mightily disturbed by this exceedingly undiplomatic plain speaking. The oblique paths were natural to him; he had not even the courage of his foolishness. Nor could Burke stir himself to indignation against so puny a creature.

"This is a bad way to set about getting money, George," he remarked judicially.

"Why, ain't you — don't you — haven't you got any to give me?" queried the other, incredulous.

Captain Burke arose then; and recalling the vocabulary of his earlier days, informed Lieutenant Ducey that he would see him to — to never mind where — to a locality much warmer than Mexico, before he would give, lend, or pay him one cent. And furthermore, that the lieutenant had his leave to write home anything and everything he something-or-other pleased; winding up this highly seasoned harangue — which, however, the captain delivered with a very calm and moderate voice and a tranquil manner, having a toler-

able control of himself at all times, and not being an excitable man — by inviting George to get out of his tent on the instant, which the latter obeyed with a bewildered and downcast countenance.

He had failed as all such blackmailing schemers should fail; and Burke almost smiled as he thought of the extraordinary simplicity of all rogues. How can any one, in conscience and common sense, be expected to rely on a known rascal keeping his bargain? A man who will sell his silence at one time, will sell his information at another, or give it away when that suits his purpose. Yet there are rascals confidently attempting to trade on such terms every day — and not always unsuccessfully, either. Even Burke, who had done no wrong, was not too agreeably moved by the vision of what George would undoubtedly write. Nat knew very well that if he had friends who would not believe it, there were those, not exactly his enemies, who would believe it; yet were he to be accused of any other crime in the calendar, he thought his character sufficiently well known for nobody to believe it! Let who will report you a perjurer, thief, murderer or what-not, you will have some defenders; but that of which George accused him is the one sin of which no man is ever believed guiltless.

Nance had met him again as she had promised. The poor thing had put on a dark, plain dress and washed the paint off her thin face, which displayed instead two bright spots of fever high up on either cheek-bone, under her cavernous eyes. They sat in the alameda in the quiet shadows, and listened to the band, and watched half a dozen brown Mexican lads playing at bull-fight — one bullet-headed little fellow about ten years old performing as the bull with infinite zest, lowering his little black poll and charging the others full tilt, and pawing the ground, when the small banderilleros advanced, with the utmost dramatic faithfulness. Nance laughed — it was the only time Nathan heard her. She was humbly happy and content with him until Ridgely passed and — and did not see them.

"That officer knew you, Nat, didn't he?" she asked a moment afterwards, with the uncanny intuition of her sex. "You know him?" Burke reluctantly admitted that he did.

"You didn't either of you speak," said Nance. "Never mind, Nathan, don't go to making excuses. I — I know why you didn't speak." And in a little while she said she was tired and would like to go "back" — she never called the place home.

"You see how it is, Nat," she said at the door. "I thought mebbe — mebbe nobody wouldn't notice me the way I look, you know. But I guess 'tain't any use. It shows — it shows no matter what I got on." She looked down at her poor shabby clothes regretfully. "It's just the way I said, you can't do for me — 'tain't fair for me to take it off'n you. It'll make you trouble sure as fate. You'd better let me go, Nat, you'd *orter* let me go."

"That's all nonsense, and I'm not going to let you go," said Burke, stoutly. And he left her, I trust, a little heartened by his company and care. It was only a day or so later that that interview with George Ducey, which has already been recorded, took place.

Our days in camp began to be full of activity now; the floating rumors condensed at last into the definite, authentic information that we were to march — we were to move upon Camargo, a hundred and twenty-five miles up the river, as soon as enough means of transportation could be got together. That last was no easy or simple matter; our general "raked and scraped the country for miles around collecting every pack-mule," as he afterwards wrote to Washington, from whence we had not been adequately prepared; and the dismal intelligence was presently published in orders, that, as had once before occurred, everybody couldn't go! "The limited means of transportation and the uncertainty in regard to supplies . . . imposes upon the commanding general the necessity of taking into the field . . . only a moderate portion of the volunteer force now under his orders," we read with long faces, and much anxiety. Of course the regulars were to go, of course! Nobody ever doubted that for a moment, and their officers were saved many heart-burnings. Captain Burke was well-nigh in a fever until he learned —oh, blessed news! — that of the twelve companies selected from the First Ohio, his was one — owing, most probably, to the happy circumstance of its name coming near the top of the list in alphabetical order; and we were shortly assigned to

Hamer's brigade of Butler's division, which was entirely composed of volunteers — a very invidious distinction, some of us thought. And behold how the whirligig of time brings in its revenges! Hamer, who, when his name had been considered for the colonelcy of our regiment, had handsomely withdrawn in favor of Mitchell who was a West Point graduate, had no more than witnessed our departure for the Rio Grande than the government elevated him to a brigadier-generalship, and he now might bear himself in centurion fashion towards our commanding officer — "Do this; and he doeth it!" I never heard that there was any bad blood between them over this, however; both got through the campaign without a great deal of distinction, and it is now a good many years since they died, each one in his bed, peaceably and ingloriously like the run of us, as if neither had ever flourished a sword and headed a charge against the enemies of his country. The other brigade-commander in our division was General Quitman with the Tennessee regiment, and his own Mississippians, as had been foretold for him. Burke's friend, Kennard, and the Baltimore battalion were brigaded in Worth's division of regulars — the only volunteer organization thus honored; and Kennard was so cocky about it that we told him plainly there was no living with him. We were all young fellows, adventurous, high-spirited, wildly elated at the prospect of action; we wanted to go somewhere, anywhere, and take a fall out of the Mexicans; our ultimate destination was uncertain, for, as somebody said, "old Taylor was as silent as the grave"; but every one was confident it was either Monterey or Saltillo. Ampudia — perhaps Santa Anna! — was somewhere in our front; his light horse and those terrific Mexican Lancers of whom we now began to hear for the first time were reported to have been seen in a dozen different places, fluttering over the country, and, it must be added, scuttling off with amazing expedition for such formidable bodies, whenever our heroes appeared. Walker, making a reconnoissance in his frontier fashion, had got quite close to their camp not far from Mier; McCullough had a brush with them a few miles north of Revilla — Captain Benjamin McCullough, greatest of scouts, a figure something in the style of Mr. Cooper's "Pathfinder." Most of us were pretty well up in that piece of classic fiction. And

whereas we had all been insufferably proud of our uniforms and gilt braid at home, no sooner had we reached the seat of war and beheld one of Walker's or McCullough's men than we were consumed with envy; how we should have rejoiced to change places! The Ranger was always a sunburned young man, dressed anyhow, booted anyhow, with a slouched hat and a slouching gait. He tied a bandanna handkerchief, or, failing that, any soiled rag that came handy, about his muscular throat; his ammunition-belt sloped in apparent carelessness about his waist; he carried a pistol or a rifle as best suited him, for every Ranger was a law unto himself in that respect. He could ride anything that went on four legs, he would as lief fight as eat, he slept, waked, ate, and drank at his discretion, addressed his captain as "Ben," and had no more notion of discipline, drill, or manœuvres than an Indian. He was a born fighter, but he would fight in his frontiersman's way — which means that he considered himself an army of one man, and planned his campaigns accordingly; nor will anybody deny that his way served the circumstances well, and had its influence on the fighting-schools of the world. Burke, who had been brought up in the backwoods system, was not so prejudiced but that he could perceive its disadvantages; indeed he had got books of tactics and military history and studied them diligently, and tried to inform himself, before leaving home. But the old leaven was strong; he would not have minded exchanging his shoulder-straps for the Rangers' costume, which seemed to him on the whole much more sensible, appropriate, and comfortable for this climate and this way of life than the stocks — "black silk or leather" — the brimless little caps, and long-skirted coats of our equipment. He talked to many of the Rangers, and listened to their plain stories of adventure, hardship, reckless and entirely unboasted bravery, with the same interest with which, as a boy, he had followed Darnell. "How old Jake would have liked this!" he sometimes thought with a smile.

In the midst of their preparations, Captain Burke, with the best will in the world, had very little time to spare for his private affairs — or at least, for that which concerned him most nearly, the girl at Matamoros. What he ought to do about her, what was to become of her, gave him not a little anxiety when he stopped to consider it; he could not take

her, he disliked to leave her, and she herself displayed a stubbornness about accepting his support which complicated the question. Once he thought of enlisting Mrs. Jefferson's sympathy, but dismissed the idea with a wry smile; that was hopeless, as he knew too well from former experience; no virtuous, good woman, no honest woman — as the phrase is — would lend a hand to Nance Darnell. It was unfair to expect it; they had their own children and families to think of, and if for no other reason, must decline association of any kind with her. The argument may sound cold-blooded, but I should like to hear anybody refute it. Nathan sometimes felt the problem to be without solution, at any rate for him, who had a thousand other matters on his mind. The condition of his company was not the least of these; he had eighteen or twenty men on the sick list; every known disease had broken out amongst them, it seemed to him, except the yellow fever, of which, strangely enough, there never was a single case that I know of in the Rio Grande camp. And this, too, although we were there in an unhealthy season of the year, and the Mexicans were reported to be counting on the assistance of *General Vomito*, as they said in a dreadful sort of joke. At the time, however, Burke was in daily fear of its appearance — he might be a captain without a company — and how, then, could he go to Monterey, or wherever we were bound?

All this was a borrowing of trouble, I find by reference to that reliable publication out of which our schoolboy learns — or does not learn — the history of his grandfather's campaigns, that the volunteer troops of the United States Army began to march up the river on the 11th of August, 1846. Our first halt was at Matamoros where we were to lay a day or so; and where Captain Burke's earliest care, after the disposition of his command, was to visit "La Lluvia de Oro." He was saluted by the pock-marked porter, to whom he was now well known, with a grimace of vile suggestion; and then this worthy handed him a letter intimating at the same time that, to his own unmeasured distress, the captain was to be disappointed. "La niña se fué!" he said, looking like a benevolent gargoyle.

Burke surveyed him in perplexity, turning the letter in his hand. He was not very glib at the Spanish tongue, and

was uncertain whether he had understood correctly. "She's gone away, you say? Is that it? Where?"

The man did not know. "Quien sabe?" He raised a shoulder in a gesture that at once released him from all responsibility, indicated his ignorance, and expressed his regret. She had given him the letter for el Señor Capitan — she had forgotten to give him, Manuel, anything — not the smallest — *una propina.* — Did the Señor understand? Something for himself, Manuel — was it not worth it? — not everybody could be trusted to deliver a letter, eh? Señor, a thousand thanks!

Burke walked away, disregarding Manuel's pressing invitation to come in and stay awhile. Nance had taken the decision into her own hands, it seemed; the young man was struck with horror and remorse at finding himself a little relieved. He stopped near a stall at the corner of the market-square, where two or three peon women were squatting in the dust with their wares spread before them, and a mess bubbling in an earthenware pan on their little brazier. An oil lamp flared overhead. Burke opened the letter; it was written in a cramped, formless hand on a single sheet of shining pink note-paper, and began with the stilted phrases which the volumes that professed to teach this kind of composition used to recommend in those days.

"Dear Frend Nat,

"I take up my pen to inform you that I am well and hope you are the same, and when this meets yore eye I will be far away. I am going away from here Nat and its no use yore hunting me up becawse I dont meen you to find me. Theres no use talking enny more about it Ive done enuff bad and I dont want to do enny more least I dont want to hurt you. And it woold hurt you Nathan if you was to have me hanging onto you the hole time. That girl yore going to get married too she woodent like it for one and I hope she wont never know about me and you woold better not tell her becawse she woodent ever get over wurrying you about me. I hope youl be very happy marrid Nat and alluz treet her good like you alluz done everybody and try and get home to the meals on time becawse I riccolleck that used to wurry Mrs. Ducey so about the men-folks not getting home to the meals on time.

I gess most ladies like her and yore girl wurries about things like that. And I hope youl have a little boy right away. I hope it ant rong for me to put that in a letter to a jentelman. So no more at present and goodbye from yore affexshunate

"NANCE.

"Ime afrade it ant wrote nor spelled very good but you know I never had much scholing. Pleese dont try to hunt me up. It done me good to see you Nat."

Nathan read it through twice; it had been written with many painful erasures and corrections, yet was a sorry thing at best. There was a large round blister beside the final words, "It done me good to see you Nat." Burke looked at it with a blur in his eyes. The women at his feet were clucking and chattering together in their lingo and as he folded up the paper and moved to go on, began a shrill crying of their sweetmeats and tortillas to the American officer. The sight of the food sickened him. He went back to his quarters weary and heavy-hearted; and tossed all night long in his unrefreshing slumbers.

It was not wholly depression of spirits that ailed the young man, as he was inclined to imagine at the beginning. The brigade moved in a couple of days; it formed part of the field division which was the last in the line of march, both Worth's and Twiggs' being in advance of us. And doubtless the First Ohio made a brave appearance and stepped along as gallantly as any other regiment in the volunteer service, even though it was deprived temporarily of one of its most valuable officers. For alas for glory and ambition! Captain Burke lay very sick of the measles in the hospital at Matamoros, and turning in his fever, saw wild visions and heard delirious noises mingling with the tramp of the infantry beneath the windows and the bugles sounding the march.

CHAPTER V

In which the Warrior languishes in his Tent

The disease of measles which children are expected to endure as a matter of course and without a murmur is in adult years accompanied by a prostrating fever, with coughings, retchings, and other disorders that somewhat tax the patience and philosophy of the sufferer. Burke, who upon the appearance of its first symptoms had pooh-poohed our regimental surgeon's orders, and announced his intention of marching with the troops at their appointed time, in twenty-four hours lapsed into a state when he was quite indifferent to the movements of the army; and never retained more than a hazy and distorted recollection of those days when the malady was at its height. He went fishing with Jake Darnell, he tried cases in court, he posted the ledger for Ducey & Co., he cut grass, he made love to Mary Sharpless; anon he came to his senses, and looked upon the high ceiling towering overhead, and the blank walls, and the bare red tile floor with a feeble wonder; and wanted to get up because the reveille was sounding; and sank back once more to his burning dreams.

During the first two days, if anything could have added to the captain's fever, it would have been the hot coals figuratively heaped upon his head by his first lieutenant. The hospital at Matamoros like all the American army hospitals in Mexico — I tell the truth to our shame — was an unwholesome barracks, dirty, neglected, ill-supplied with medicines or the proper food for invalids; and the nursing so incompetent that none but the most robust of the sick men stood much chance of recovery, whatever their ills. In spite of all this, George Ducey, the moment he heard of his senior's seizure, hastened to this unattractive place, and for the remaining time before the regiment marched, hardly left his bedside;

nor could any one have asked a kinder, more patient, cheerful, and zealous attention. It was a work of genuine mercy and charity; and showed that warm-heartedness of his mother's which, as John Vardaman used to say, was the least of Mrs. Ducey's good qualities and the best of George's. Whatever cause Burke may have had to complain of him, let me set this much down to George Ducey's credit; and I may add that it was the only one of his actions about which I never knew him to lie or boast. I am the more anxious that it should be acknowledged, because, at the time, Nat was scarcely conscious of the other's presence and care and certainly must have seen him go without a word of thanks. When he strove to recall what happened during this period of his illness, he classed George with the rest of the phantoms of that fever-haunted time — with visions of his colonel and other uniformed figures appearing, murmuring in the corners, eying him from the foot of the bed, and drifting away — with the doctor, and with some dark-skinned Mexican woman who was forever trying to make him drink. It was from these latter that he afterwards learned of George's devotion — learned with a kind of shamed surprise.

When he arrived at the convalescent stage in a week or more,— for measles, if severe, are also mercifully of short duration, and, being in clean physical condition when attacked, Nat perhaps made a better recovery than had he been of a weak or sickly habit, — the army was gone excepting the slight garrison Taylor had left behind to secure the post. Matamoros had returned almost to its native calm; there was an uncanny silence abroad; no more ordnance rumbling through the contracted streets; no more Rangers, "bloody with spurring, fiery red with haste," thundering in from the country, jingling and clattering with straps and stirrup-buckles, exactly as you may hear the mounted messengers "off stage" when you go of a night to see "Shenandoah" or Mr. Gillette in "Held by the Enemy." No more soldiers drunk and sober, fighting or friendly, crowding the liquor-shops to the doors, hurrahing and horse-playing, gambling, cock-maining, throwing their money to the four winds. Never before — and probably never since — had the stolid little town known such a time of excitement and profit. But lo, now even the saloon-keepers and faro-dealers packed

up their stock in trade and took the trail for Camargo; perhaps some of the "actors" too — vultures all, battening on the refuse of both armies. The Mexican tradesmen were reappearing; the gentry, many of whom had fled in a panic to their outlying haciendas on the approach of the Americans, dug up their money and valuables and timidly returned. "Still, the place is dead, perfectly dead. We're going back to the States as soon as we can raise the money," a friend of Burke's confided to him.

This was young Mr. Joseph Jefferson, who, happening in his public station where all the gossip of the camp was briskly circulated to hear of the captain's illness, came at once to visit him, with that kind and hearty sympathy which I am sure has always been characteristic of this gentleman. At first he was not admitted, Burke's exceedingly unromantic complaint being then at its worst; but his second call found the invalid sitting up, weak and unshaven, and, I think, displaying that hopeful sign, a furious bad temper.

"Where's your brother?" said Joseph, looking all about; "that young fellow that was here taking care of you before, I mean. He was your brother, wasn't he?"

Burke growled out, No, he wasn't — he wasn't any kin to him — his name was Ducey — he wished to Heaven people wouldn't be everlastingly poking it at him that George Ducey was his brother. Why, he'd marched — gone with the army.

"It's a pity he had to go — he was a mighty good nurse, the doctor said."

"He *was* good to me," the other admitted rather shamefacedly; "I didn't know much about it. I've been out of my head right along."

"Yes. So they said. He knows Badger — wasn't it funny? Met him here in Matamoros, playing fa — that is, around somewhere in town, I mean," said Jefferson, correcting himself hastily. "But Ed didn't know his name, either — half the time you don't ask people's names, there're so many officers."

"Badger? Who's Badger?"

"Why, my partner, Ed Badger. Didn't you meet him — oh, no, I remember, he wasn't around the day you were there. I'll bring him up some day soon to see you. There isn't

anything to do now any more — the bottom's out of the coffee-and-pie business."

"Has the 'Grand Spanish Saloon' gone up, too?" Burke inquired with a flicker of interest.

"Nothing left of it but the bad name and fixtures," said the boy with a sigh of humorous regret. "Trade fell off terribly here when the army went, you know. There's nobody to get drunk — no Americans, that is. You can't make a living getting the Mexicans drunk on pulque. It's only about three cents a glass — and they're whaling big glasses! Our proprietor got discouraged and quit. Matamoros was no place for an honest, hard-working fellow like him. We're going, too —" and he made the statement quoted above.

He kept his word, to bring Mr. Badger, thinking, no doubt, in the goodness of his heart, that Burke would like to meet and talk to somebody who knew his dear friend Ducey, whom, however, the actor only referred to very briefly and with a queer side-glance at Nathan, which the latter thought he understood. Nat was glad enough to make Badger's acquaintance for his own sake; he was a most amiable and genial man. He had been on the stage all his life, and was now some twenty-eight or thirty years old, with a nondescript, serviceable education picked up nobody knows how, a pair of astonishingly long, active legs trained to various tricks of dancing and drollery, the ideal face for Sam Weller, and secret aspirations towards Hamlet. He was a great deal funnier off the stage, and when he meant to be serious, than on, when he wanted to be funny — as I can testify, having seen him in both localities. Joe and he, they said, had appeared together in those comedy parts where the humor is pointed and emphasized by a foot or so of difference in height. But even in those young days Jefferson must have been ten times the better actor. During the fortnight while Burke was getting back his strength — with a slowness maddening to his impatient spirit — the two young men used to come and entertain him by the hour almost daily; they read, they sang, they painted their faces, got out a pair of "property" weapons and performed a broadsword combat for him in character, with tremendous *ha*-ings and stampings. They spouted Shakespeare to the captain who had had few

opportunities of going to the theatre in our little city, and had never witnessed a presentation of the dramas he so loved to read. Honest Badger raged and roared and tore a passion to tatters, swelling the veins in his neck, and rolling out his r's with a grand good-will — Bless me, I can hear him now: "I'd r-r-r-ather-r-r be a DOG, and BAY the MOON, than such a RR-r-r-oman!" These were Badger's conceptions of high tragedy; whereas Jefferson made few gestures, and seldom raised his voice out of an ordinary speaking tone, yet the words sought one's very heart. I have heard him repeat those lines of the poor little Prince Arthur —

> "So I were out of prison and kept sheep,
> I should be merry as the day is long —"

with an accent so simple, wistful, and touching, it brought tears to the eyes.

The night before he left Matamoros, Captain Burke, somewhat haggard about the jaws, and not so steady upon his legs — which now appeared even longer and lanker than Badger's — as he had been, but still in a tolerably fair way towards his usual health, went to bid Mrs. Jefferson good-by — they themselves were going down to the Brazos in a few days; and Burke spent the evening and got the lady to recite for him the speech of Katharine before her judges, a thing for nobility and dignity and womanliness long to be remembered; he also displayed an appetite for dinner which he has ever since recalled with shame; and he passed some jokes about Metta — who had another lover, a Mexican lad with a belt full of knives — to Joe's confusion; and came away at last regretfully wondering if he would ever see them again, players being a wandering tribe. Indeed, it was a good while; the next time that he met Joseph was at least twenty years later, when the latter was playing an engagement in Chicago — it was "Rip Van Winkle," then newly added to his repertory. Burke watched the performance, and, I dare say, blew his nose with suspicious frequency while it was going on, from an orchestra chair; and after the second act ventured around to the stage door, and sent up his card, having written "Matamoros" upon it for identification. But Rip remembered him at once, sent word for General Burke to come up to his dressing-room, and as the

latter entered, saluted him from the table where he was engaged with grease paint and what-not in metamorphosing a very active and youthful-looking man of thirty-five into a decrepit personage with flowing white hair and a coat of wonderful stage rags — I say he saluted Burke with, "This isn't a very good place for a boy like you, my son!" and they both roared out laughing.

The captain also received a hearty God-speed from Mr. Badger, who at this time had some notion of joining the army himself, and asked all manner of absurd questions about the needful steps. Edward, who was a harmlessly vain, good-hearted, helter-skelter sort of fellow, rather fancied himself in the costume, posing for a charge at the head of a division — no mere regiment or company would have satisfied him. And I have no doubt he would have done his duty, and carried himself bravely before the enemy. But, although he did turn up in Monterey after the capitulation among the hordes of Americans from everywhere and nowhere who mysteriously swarmed into the place on the heels of our men, Badger had by that time forgotten all about his military ambitions; he had joined a circus company instead! Burke hunted him up and tried in some measure to return his kindnesses; and presently lost sight of him again when we marched for Victoria. If the captain could have foreseen the semi-tragic circumstances of his next meeting with this jovial mountebank, what would have been his astonishment and dismay!

Captain Burke then moved upon Monterey in good order, the first days of September, making all the speed he could, for he knew that his associates of the field division had by this time reached Camargo, and the regulars were probably farther still on the road. This was the news that had come down the river, with any number of the usual wildly contradictory rumors about overwhelming forces of Mexicans ready to give battle in our front, fierce cavalry skirmishing on our flanks, ambuscades, and alarms; the enemy were alternately said to be contesting every inch of the way, and falling back like sheep; the populace were at one and the same time welcoming us with open arms as deliverers of the oppressed — this was a favorite fiction in

the American camp — and lurking in the rear to rob and murder the unwary as we marched. The transports were still plying on the river, although as it was now approaching the beginning of the dry season, Burke was informed that they might not ply much longer, Camargo being the limit of navigation at any time. He was amazed to find on a visit made to Texas in later years that the Rio Grande, which he remembered as a mighty and majestic body of water near its mouth, shrank, several hundred miles farther up at the town of Laredo, to a pitiful narrowness — though still big enough to have held some dozen or more of the captain's native Scioto. That, however, was in the middle of winter when not a drop of rain had fallen in these parts for months. Nat got himself and his luggage on board one of the boats, in company with a handful of other convalescents likewise bent on rejoining their commands, and they would have had a pleasant enough voyage of it if everybody had not been in such a state of feverish hurry. They sat about the hot, steamy decks, cursing their ill luck aloud, the very worst and most profanely impatient of them all being, as I remember, a ghastly pale, weak young lieutenant who had been in hospital with some kind of low fever, and was not nearly recovered. Burke and the others guessed that this poor boy was already bound upon a different and longer journey; he failed visibly; and, indeed, had a relapse and died within a few days after landing; and the officers, his fellow-travellers, took up a collection amongst themselves to bury him. One of the party remarked after the funeral with a grisly humor that he was going to follow poor ——'s example, get the good of his money while he could, and die with empty pockets — "for," said he, "why bother about leaving enough to bury you decently? You'll be buried, never fear! Nobody's going to leave you lying around, I guess." The fact is, none of them had much money at this time.

At Camargo the squad of convalescents was augmented by a very large number who had been in hospital there. Whether the place itself was unhealthy, or the army overtaxed by the march thither — for not a tenth could be taken by the transports — the sick-list was so heavy here that the men got to calling this camp "the Graveyard"; and perhaps added to its dire reputation by joining the ranks when they

should have been in their beds. The rear guard had marched thirty-six hours before Burke's arrival — oh, cursed spite of Fate! He had known that we could not reach them in time; but thirty-six hours is a provokingly narrow margin. The impressive figure of Fame seemed to be receding before us, like a will-o'-the-wisp. For nothing was more certain, we said to one another with gloomy head-shakes, than that an action would take place before we could catch up with the army; Santa Anna would never allow Taylor to get within striking distance of Monterey without opposition; there would be a great fight and a great victory — for the Americans, of course — and we wouldn't be there!

Santa Anna, as it happened, was nowhere in the neighborhood, nor dreaming of coming there, although as he was generalissimo of the Mexican forces he might well have been directing their movements. But it was Ampudia who commanded at Monterey with troops variously reported as numbering all the way from two thousand to ten. And on the very day when Captain Burke and his companions set out from Camargo — the body of the army having now reached Seralvo — the Mexican "General-in-Chief of the Army of the North" as he styled himself, issued a fiery address in Napoleonic phrases to the patriots under him: "Soldiers!" said he, with a tremendous flourish, "Soldiers! The enemy, numbering only 2500 regular troops, the remainder being only a band of adventurers without valor or discipline, are, according to reliable information, about advancing upon Seralvo to commit the barbarity of attacking this most important place; we count nearly 3000 regulars and auxiliary cavalry, and these will defeat them again and again before they can reach this city. Soldiers, we are constructing fortifications . . . and thence we will sally forth at a convenient time and drive back this enemy at the point of the bayonet! Soldiers! I have assured the supreme government of the triumph of our arms, confiding in your loyalty and enthusiasm. . . . Soldiers! Victory or death must be our only device!"

The plain old man who commanded on our side did not think it necessary to discharge any such blast of eloquence upon his troops, expecting us, it is likely, to do our duty without any words about it, as he did his; and to be sure, has

not General Scott pointed out that " . . . he (Taylor) was slow of thought, hesitant in speech, and unused to the pen," all defects of which no man on earth could accuse General Scott. We were obliged to advance upon Monterey without encouragement in this line from old Rough-and-Ready, and I hardly think we could have bettered the results even had Taylor been possessed of Scott's fluency. By what the ex-invalids hurrying in the rear regarded as nothing less than a direct interposition of Providence, the army, having committed the barbarity of occupying Seralvo, halted there four days to concentrate; it was halted again a couple of days' march farther at the village of Marin; and it was here, within twenty-five miles of Monterey, that we at last overtook them. Captain Burke reported for duty the 18th of September, and so far not a shot had been fired.

Our army was encamped in a plain or plateau bordered by the San Juan River, and surrounded by most lovely mountain scenery, the like of which few of us had ever beheld, coming from the quiet landscapes of our native states. Kennard, whom Burke fell in with on the way to division headquarters, — he did not know the captain had been ill, and heard it with a very kind concern, — said it reminded him a little of Harper's Ferry. "The Mexicans call that biggest mountain *The Saddle*," he explained; "it looks like one, doesn't it? And the other's *The Mitre*. You can see the city from places around here, the air's so clear; I saw it yesterday. It's funny to think we're so near at last. And the queerest thing, Burke, the little, silent, empty towns we've come through all the way from Seralvo — everybody cleared out. Like a fairy-tale — the Sleeping-Beauty — with a difference!" The whole way, he said, their brigade of Worth's, which marched at the head, had been close behind a body or bodies of Mexican horse, Torrejon's cavalry, the scouts thought; they would flit into view, hover, and vanish, a mile, sometimes less, ahead, any hour of the day; never able, apparently, to make up their minds to attack, or to wait for our charge. These were the gentlemen who were to beat us again and again, and the whole army indulged in a great deal of merriment at their expense. I have rarely seen men more confident and gay on the eve of action.

Mr. Burke, learning that pay-day had arrived during the

month of his absence, took an opportunity to present his claim at the paymaster's department; when he discovered, to his surprise, that Captain Burke's money had already been handed over and receipted for in due form on the rolls. Burke was not personally known to the paymaster — an officer of volunteers like himself — and however this mistake had occurred (something which was never wholly cleared up) there was at the moment no way of correcting it, in fact no time for formalities of any sort, as we were about to march. The captain returned to his command not at all disturbed in mind; we had more important matters to occupy us. About ten o'clock of the next morning — September 19 — as we were advancing rapidly in close order, Burke's company being near the head of the column, all at once, with a very loud, deep, and thunderous sound, a cannon at Monterey began to roar.

There was a little pause, and then two more reports, and the order to halt was given. We were all very much excited. At intervals during the morning, as we wound about between the hills, the town had come in sight, with its roofs and the cathedral spire precisely defined in that clean air; and now our advance must have got within range. Somebody said that the guns were twelve-pounders firing from the citadel, and that one shot had gone within ten feet of General Taylor as he rode with his staff in the First Division. We were presently ordered into camp in a grove of trees near by; the engineers went forward and the Rangers for a reconnoissance; all day long — a clear and hot day — we heard the heavy guns and the musketry from the city.

CHAPTER VI

In which the First Ohio behaves Well under Fire

The Mexican War, as has already been noted, fared most magnificently at the hands of contemporary historians who spared no adjectives nor exclamation points in the glorifying of our American arms; and in spite of them, the same war, as has also been noted, is all but forgot, or arouses only the slenderest of attention to-day. For either or both of which reasons, it seems scarcely worth while for the present writer to add his brick to the heap, and tax the souls of his readers with dreary details. The siege of Monterey shall be dismissed as speedily as possible in this history; and let it be said once for all of Captain Burke's performances, both here and elsewhere, that they were creditable to himself, but no more dashing nor glorious than those of a thousand other brave and upright men — among whom I make bold to class him.

The city of Monterey, as you may read in a dozen accounts, lay along a curve of the river San Juan in a pretty strong natural position. It was defended on our right by a large, lofty building, the Bishop's palace, turned into a fort with guns and protecting works, which stood — and still stands, such was the original strength and thickness of its walls — on a height commanding the western approaches of the city; the Citadel, about midway of the northern front of the town, a formidable piece of fortification, built of black stone, covering two or three acres with its bastions and outworks, and proportionately furnished with guns and men. As far as I know, setting aside the planting of two howitzers — the only siege guns we had — in a ravine facing it, there was no attack, nor even any demonstration made against this place; and I was afterwards told by Major-general Quitman, that, happening to be with Taylor at the time of his giving the order for Worth's advance, the general turned to

his council, and said, with a smile: "I think, gentlemen, we'll let the Black Fort alone for a while. We don't want to bite off more than we can chew." At the eastern end of the town there were three strong redoubts, and a fortified bridge across a little stream which entered the San Juan thereabouts; besides all this the city proper, which was built, as if in the intention to resist a siege, of stout low one-story stone houses, was barricaded from wall to wall and street to street up to the very doors of the cathedral in the main plaza, and a great many unofficial defenders took a hand in the fight from behind these impromptu fortifications.

The issue of this conflict is well known. With an equal force, with the moral and physical advantage of an entrenched position, with a chain of defences so strong that one of them was never attempted, and another (the Diablo redoubt) held out victoriously until he himself withdrew its garrison, with a populace which lent him all possible encouragement and support, with supplies to have lasted for weeks — with all this General Pedro de Ampudia, at the end of three days' fighting, gave up Monterey. I do not like to picture the feelings of the gallant men who served under him; there seems to be something in the Spanish character, a something transmitted to its utmost strain of blood, that renders it incapable or unfit to command, while most prompt, resolute, and courageous to obey. For let nobody imagine that we effected a lodgment in the city and got the upper hand easily or without resistance; we may have been better soldiers than the Mexican rank-and-file, but we were no braver men.

The Ohio volunteers figured only very insignificantly on the first day of the siege, in a spectacular showing towards sundown of a few companies apiece from Twiggs's and Butler's corps, along a high plain or shoulder of the mountains, where they could be seen by the city sentinels, and draw attention from Worth's movement against the Bishop's palace. Our chance came the next morning about ten o'clock when the general ordered out reënforcements to support Colonel Garland's attack on the redoubts at the left. Mitchell's regiment, with Major-general Butler in the front, gallantly leading his division into action, pushed up between the redoubts and the bridge-head under a severe fire which

the men stood up to in good style; at the same time the other brigade of volunteers under Quitman charged and took the work farthest from us (the Teneria), so that, although we were presently ordered to retire without having individually gained a foot, something had been accomplished by our presence. And a cavalry charge by the Mexicans following up this withdrawal (the sight of which seemed to have sent the enemy quite frantic with delight! The cathedral bells were ringing, and the lancers hurrahing madly as they came after us), we took cover behind a convenient hedge of our old acquaintance "that d—d chaparral," whence Captain Burke and his associates delivered so brisk a fire that the cavalry appeared measurably satisfied to charge in the opposite direction. Burke came out of this engagement ranking officer, his three seniors having been seriously wounded; and the command thus devolving upon him, he brought off what remained of the regiment, which had suffered heavily, in a tolerably well-ordered and soldierly manner, and, as to himself, without a scratch.

The 22d the division spent resting in camp at Walnut Springs about three miles from the city, and under water instead of fire, for it rained hard and continuously; and Burke, who, as I have said, was unhurt and in excellent trim, chafed a good deal at this inaction. Towards evening an express came in with the news that Worth had stormed the last of the defences on the western heights, and their guns were now trained on the city itself. Captain Burke, hearing at the same time that General Quitman, now our division commander, Butler having been wounded the previous day, was to be sent to relieve the north front lines, went to him personally with a request to accompany his command; the general, with that kindness and sympathy which almost from their first meeting he always manifested towards the young man, responded by allowing him to go on his own staff as a volunteer aide. But the struggle was already all but over; during the night Ampudia withdrew his troops from the outworks, concentrating in the city and citadel, and at daybreak we occupied without resistance the forts of the Diablo and La Libertad, where there had been such carnage on our first visit, a little more than twenty-four hours before. Thence the Americans commenced a forward movement into

the city, which presently became a hand-to-hand and house-to-house fight. We had to batter down and tunnel through one wall after another, and found every shop and shanty a fort. They made a most stubborn opposition. The firing was very severe although nothing like what it had been on the 21st, except at one street running directly from the cathedral, where there was a hot fusillade through its whole length. Burke reached this place in company with a Captain Henry of the 3d Infantry whom he had fallen in with, I don't remember where — at the time neither one knew the other's name; and it was here while they were debating the next move that Burke saw the American commander for the first time near at hand. "Look! There's the general — that's Taylor now!" his companion exclaimed.[1]

He was in the town with his staff, on foot, walking about, perfectly indifferent to the danger, in uniform, of course, but, as I remember, with a large gray slouched or shade hat on his head, and a bandanna knotted around his neck in "Ranger" fashion. He crossed the street where there was such a furious fire at a walk, and by every chance should have been shot down. We *ran* over with some of the men, and Henry began an agitated remonstrance, something about the general's life being too valuable to be exposed so recklessly, and so on, to which General Taylor replied: "Take that axe and break down that door!"

I have since seen many flaming lithographs and engravings of General Taylor's triumphal entry into Monterey, and never without a laugh. He is always on a caracoling white horse, he brandishes a sword, he is bedizened with plumes and gold braid; the Mexicans reel before him, heaps of cannon and corpses encumber his path, the wounded feebly cheer him on. These are noble conceptions — and about as near the truth as all such portrayals of war, about which there is, to my mind at least, little fit to be pictured, or altogether pleasing to remember. When Burke obediently

[1] Captain Henry afterwards wrote a memoir of the Mexican War in which this incident is related very much as Burke recollected it. Taylor's bearing on this occasion seems to have made a profound impression on both young men. Henry's book was published by Harpers about 1860, and is probably still to be had at the libraries.
— M. S. W.

picked up that axe and broke down that door with a smart blow or two, there was nobody behind it but a poor wretch of an apothecary cowering on the floor of his shop amongst his bottles and pill-boxes; and his wife and children came and flung themselves at our knees with wildly imploring gestures. "Bueno. Amigo. Bueno," says our kind old leader, patting the head of the youngster nearest him reassuringly. I think the scene and act became him better and were more worthy of picturing than a thousand triumphs.

That night Ampudia wrote a message of capitulation in which he said he had made all the defence of which the city was capable, and done all required by military honor; it was a manly and straightforward acknowledgment of defeat, creating an impression which, I am sorry to say, his later manœuvres and prevarications thoroughly effaced. Officers were appointed from both sides to settle upon the terms of surrender. The cannon fell silent; the swords were all sheathed, and everybody sat down with a pen instead, to tell some anxious soul two thousand miles away who did not even know when or where a battle might be going on, that it was all over, and we were alive and unhurt, and poor So-and-So was gone — shot through the lungs in the assault on the palace — and Such-a-One would get the colonelcy, of course. The surgeons were very busy; Captain Burke set to work at his sad list of dead, wounded, and missing; and his own name was mentioned handsomely in despatches home, to his great gratification.

In this matter of the capitulation of Monterey our general afterwards came in for some of the most unjust and ungrateful criticism, and the harshest censure that ever any government bestowed on a faithful servant. He was condemned for not pursuing the enemy with more speed and vigor when the very fault-finders whose business it was to provide him with supplies and transportation had failed to do so; for not pressing the siege closer when he had no siege artillery nor entrenching tools; for not taking the entire Mexican army, officers and men, prisoners of war, when it was as much as he or any man could do in that barren and hostile country to subsist his own men and maintain his position, let alone guard and care for a troop of prisoners numbering more than

his whole force; for consenting to a cessation of hostilities, or treating with the enemy at all; for suffering the garrison to depart with the honors of war, and the Mexican gunners to salute their captured flag. His political opponents speedily seized upon and made capital out of the administrative discontent; and when a resolution of thanks to General Taylor and the army was offered in Congress, it carried the amendment: "that nothing herein contained shall be construed into an approbation of the terms of capitulation at Monterey." A brave man who feels that he has done his duty may, perhaps, dispense with the approbation of his superiors; and as to those who have been here called his political opponents, General Taylor was at once too strong and single of heart to heed their attacks; when the question of his candidacy for the Presidency had been broached to him during the summer, he wrote simply, "I have not the leisure to attend to it now. The war demands every moment of my present time." It was not the answer his correspondents would have got from that able wielder of the pen, General Scott; and indeed, that hero exhibited afterwards in his autobiography — and may have at the time, for all we knew — the utter futility of the Monterey expedition, its waste of time, men, and money, and the meagreness of its results. "*Cui bono?*" says he elegantly and appropriately, displaying throughout his masterly work a splendid command of the Latin primer and those of several other languages. And this opinion being shared by the President and Secretary of War, and Taylor's success having fully demonstrated his incompetency, they presently detached from him a considerable part of his army, Patterson's command, and ordered it elsewhere without the formality of consulting our general, or even of notifying him; and followed this up by despatching Scott to the Rio Grande with authority to help himself to practically all the regulars and almost all of the seasoned volunteer troops remaining.

All these events, however, went on more or less over the heads, as it were, of the army; certainly outside the sphere of such small fry as Captain Burke. The rumors of dissatisfaction at Washington, when they finally reached us, concrete in newspapers and letters, caused a kind of angry bewilderment and dismay. What did the President want?

What did the public want? Hadn't we taken Monterey? From our point of view it was almost ludicrously unreasonable to find fault with the general for the particular way in which he had got possession of a city, so long as he had actually got possession of it. At the distance whence these comments were made, how could their authors be acquainted with all the circumstances? We could not make out what all the talk was about, and were inclined to put it down to political chicanery, Whig or Democratic intriguing. The officers said to one another that we should like to have some of these bawling, blatherskiting, cheap-John stump-speakers and petty demagogues down here in Mexico a while; we should like to see how one of them would have invested Monterey, reduced the Citadel, and taken everybody prisoners! We ourselves saw the Mexican army march away without resentment; it is only the non-fighters who are forever shrieking for the enemy's blood. Burke himself was occupied the first few days after the surrender with a matter to which he should have attended before, and that now gave him a serious concern; for when he made up that list, entering our losses with a grave heart, Lieutenant George Ducey was among the missing.

The truth is, rejoining his regiment the day and almost the hour when it marched, Captain Burke, after some hurried inquiries, finding that nobody knew exactly where George was, but that everybody had "just seen him," or seen him yesterday, or thought he was "somewhere" — the captain, I say, gave him up for the moment, taking no further trouble about George, whom, besides, he could not very well have sought in a body of several hundred men, which itself was only a part of another body of several thousand. And let us be frank, my friends. Did Nat care greatly about seeing George? He must thank the young man for those kind-hearted attentions at Matamoros — and I fear that Captain Nathan was not of so free and noble a spirit as to find that a pleasant duty. I have said it before, the man is an exalted character who can take a favor well; nor would it ever be easy to take one from somebody we dislike. No, I think Burke was a little glad not to meet George Ducey at once; and the stirring events of succeeding hours put the lieutenant out of his mind altogether. Now it was borne in upon him with a growing

anxiety that a very grave thing had occurred — no graver, to be sure, than the loss by death or otherwise of scores of our men — but he knew George — George was one of his own company — and there was the poor mother at home perhaps on her knees at that moment praying for her boy. Burke went about the search in good earnest — lo, this time nobody had seen Lieutenant Ducey, nobody knew anything about him, even those who had assured the captain that they had seen him "somewhere" shortly before the fight, now declared he had been missing for a week! *Long before* we got to Monterey, they said earnestly, he had disappeared, before Marin, before Seralvo.

Burke took these statements, which were made in perfect good faith, with allowances, for the confusion and hurry of the late happenings; he himself felt as if the three days of the siege had been as many months, as if he had been away from home a year; and could not remember whether such and such a thing had befallen on Sunday or Monday, or this week or last. George, he thought, could not have been missing on the march; it would have been remarked; an officer does not stray like a private. He was not in hospital, for that was easily and definitely settled at once by inquiry of the proper officials; he was not with the regiment, but he might be elsewhere in the army; he might have volunteered as an aide like Burke himself, or gone on a reconnoissance, and been shot or taken, or he might —

The objection to all these guesses was one which Burke shrank from discussing with anybody, and rebuked himself for entertaining. He could not imagine George steadfast in any position of danger, voluntarily facing bodily harm. Nat believed from the bottom of his heart that if ever a coward existed on earth, it was George Ducey; George on a reconnoissance or taking part in an attack was inconceivable. Yet it is impossible to say what even a cowardly man may do at times; and if his body was not lying in some of the hastily dug grave trenches about the city, in some ravine, corn-field, or copse of chaparral, then where was he? The captain felt a sting of remorse when he remembered how sharp had been his last conscious words with George, and the poor young fellow's kindness later; after all, what need to have been so harsh with him? What could you expect of George Ducey?

Truly, his ridiculous attempt at blackmail was a little worse than anything Burke had ever known him to do before; hitherto, his lying and bragging and borrowing had never really harmed anybody much but himself; it was only natural and inevitable that such a character should deteriorate; but even so, and although George had no earthly claim on him, it seemed to Burke that old acquaintance, common memories, ordinary humanity, the regard he felt for the rest of the family imposed a sort of responsibility on him. It was as little Francie had said long ago: *somebody* must look out for George. Dimly Nathan began to perceive the immemorial weapon of the weak: help me, or you push me down hill — take care of me, or on your own head be my undoing!

Moved by all this, the captain prosecuted his search with such vigor, as to give some color to that old report of his kinship with the missing man; and his task, ironically enough, was not rendered any easier by his brother-officers who, out of the consideration they thought due to Ducey's relative, did not always answer his questions as plainly as they might, or tried so hard to soften their statements that they ended by being valueless. However, it was presently established beyond doubt that Lieutenant Ducey had not been with his own regiment or brigade nor volunteered on any other service, nor been seen in any part of the field during the three days' fighting; at some time which nobody seemed able to fix, Lieutenant Ducey had vanished, literally bag and baggage, for none of his clothes and possessions, even to that Mexican saddle about which Burke had rated him so soundly, could be found; with so many thieving Mexicans about, this was not so surprising. And it was in fact more than likely that some of these latter gentry could have accounted for the unfortunate boy's disappearance. Burke thought with horror of the letter he must sit down and write to the family at home; if George had fallen in battle, it would have been bad enough, but in all probability robbed and murdered, and his body cast aside for the buzzards or the lean, starveling dogs — Merciful God, what an end!

"Not your cousin — Ducey not your cousin?" said an officer, to whom Burke was confiding this gloomy view, in astonishment, "Why, what relation was he, then?"

"None at all, I tell you," said Nat, impatiently; "I don't

know how that story got around. We come from the same place, that's all."

"Well, but he was your friend — you were great friends, of course?" asked the other, cautiously.

"No, not such very great friends, only — I've known him all his life, you see. I know the family very well, and I've got to find out something about him — I've got to write home and tell his mother — poor woman! It's an awful business — if we could only find the — the body, it would be a kind of comfort to her, maybe, but this way —"

"Oh, so that's the reason you were making such a fuss," said the other, with a perceptible change of manner; "you — you seemed to take it so to heart, I didn't like to say anything before — and of course it is an awfully sad thing for any young fellow to go that way," he interpolated hastily; "and I'm sorry for his mother, but Ducey himself — why, I'd just as lief say right out, he's no great loss. Don't like to talk about a dead man — but it's no more than I'd have said while he was alive. I knew Ducey pretty well. If he's got killed, it wasn't fighting; he'd be much more likely to drop down dead from heart-disease running away! Say, I guess you didn't hear that story about him and Crittenden? You say you've been in hospital, and then, of course, if people think you're his cousin, they won't be so liable to tell you."

This is a sample of the plain talk Captain Burke succeeded in getting when he had industriously removed the impression about his connection with George; he was amazed to find what a character the young man had become in the camp. The story about him and Crittenden, which Nat had missed so far, appeared to have circulated throughout the whole army, and was actually the last thing anybody remembered definitely about George. Mr. Thomas L. Crittenden of Kentucky was one of a number of young gentlemen who were to be met with almost everywhere during the Mexican campaigns, moving with our armies, living at their own charges, without official rank, and, though not in the service formally, volunteering whenever a volunteer was needed, and performing deeds of as much risk and difficulty as if they had held a dozen commissions; Mr. Crittenden himself having assumed the duties of General Taylor's aide during the engagements just past, a post wherein he displayed the utmost gallantry,

so that our general (who was always most scrupulous and painstaking to render honor where honor was due) put his name in the despatches. Burke met him and liked him exceedingly; he was a long, tall, lank young man, with a very gentle voice and manners, a great talent for playing cards, and none at all for playing the banjo, upon which, nevertheless, he liked to thrum by the hour, always carrying one about with him. The gist of the Ducey story, as near as Burke could ever make out, was this: Lieutenant Ducey, being in a company while Mr. Crittenden was executing a voluntary on his instrument, and considering himself a judge of music, began by going through a great many satirically significant nods, winks, shrugs, and other pantomime to express his amused disapproval. I do not know what else he did or said, but Mr. Crittenden was reported to have borne it all with commendable patience and good-humor until George finally remarked with an open sneer:—

"What a wonderfully good ear you have for music, Mr. Crittenden!"

To which the other replied mildly: "I have, sir, and some people have wonderfully good noses for pulling!" Saying which, Mr. Crittenden of Kentucky laid aside his banjo, and rising up, very rapidly and dexterously performed that feat upon the person of Lieutenant Ducey, to the entertainment of all the spectators.

It was not to be expected that this occurrence would be kept quiet, or that either of the principals would be allowed to forget it. The fashion of taking a gentleman's revenge for an insult, bloody and foolish as it was, had not gone out with Mr. Clay's defeat for the Presidency; but Burke was not surprised to hear that Crittenden, although holding himself in readiness for a challenge, had not received one. George had been content to sit down with his pulled nose, apparently. The affair had taken place, they said, shortly after the army marched from Seralvo; and some averred that Lieutenant Ducey had not been seen since. The official account of the battle had long since gone home; and that passage beginning ominously, "I regret to report —" was doubtless known word for word to many a sad heart to whom the much-decried terms of the capitulation seemed but a trivial matter in comparison, when Captain Burke reluctantly sat down to

confirm to Mrs. Ducey the tidings of her son's disappearance. He told her the truth as gently as it could be told; that George could not be found; that the chance of his being alive was one in a hundred; it would have been no mercy to have aroused any sort of hope in the poor mother's heart. Burke could honestly speak with regret of the dead man; he dwelt on George's kindness to him in his sickness, tried to recall the times when George had talked about her and home, the things he had said; perhaps the captain furbished up these instances a little — who would not? — yet George was really fond of his mother. And ended with some words of sympathy, awkwardly put, no doubt, yet sincere. Mrs. Ducey would be wondering bitterly why her son had to be taken and a young fellow like Burke without father or mother to mourn him spared, he said to himself, as he went out and posted the letter.

The writing of this was so dismal a business that Nat was glad enough to encounter and join half a dozen light-hearted lads — one of them had got a bullet through the thigh in the fight at the bridge-head, and was limping about on crutches with the jauntiest air in the world! — on leave from the camp at Walnut Springs where General Taylor still had his headquarters, and bent on driving dull care away in Monterey. The city was tolerably well provided for that purpose; already, in the short month elapsed since its fall, there had appeared the advance-guard of that other American invasion, which forever followed in the trail of our army; those beauties arrayed more richly than the lilies of the field and who, like the lilies, neither toiled nor spun for a living; those frock-coated, tall-hatted, impenetrable, reserved gentlemen with diamonds on their fingers, pistols in their hip pockets, and an amazing facility at manipulating playing-cards — all, all were here, the old familiar faces. The billiard-halls were running night and day; the cock-pits were in operation; there was another "Grand Spanish Saloon," I swear, in full blast, not to mention half a hundred lesser ones. The theatre was open, the bands played in the plaza, our friends the Rangers were galloping in and out as of old, the volunteers were getting drunk and disgracing the service and being haled off to their regimental caboose by details of sober ones — vogue la galère! Somebody had heard that there

was a circus established in the town — a real circus-troupe from the United States! Let's all go to the circus — here, Burke, don't you want to see the circus? — Hi there, you fellow, six — seven — eight tickets to the circus!

This entertainment was quartered in the bull-ring at the Plaza of San Antonio over towards the western part of town; the enemy's mortar-battery had been planted there the night of the 23d, and was still in position although quite lost to view amongst the gilt-and-crimson circus-wagons parked in the open space around it. We got there just in time for the "Grand Entree," and as the parade filed in, brass band, piebald horses, lovely ladies in velvet and tinsel and delicately flopping ballet-skirts, the Bounding Jockey, the India-rubber Man (with feats on the slack rope), the Hindoo Juggler, the celebrated monkey *Dandy Jack* riding the equally celebrated trick pony *Comanche*, Captain Burke recognized to his vast surprise and amusement his acquaintance Mr. Edward Badger, limber-legged, in the loose flowing Pierrot costume and peaked hat affected by clowns of that era, striding humorously along, exchanging facetiæ with the ringmaster, and tremendously popular with the crowd. "I'd r-r-rather-r-r-r be a DOG —"! Burke thought it was something of a comedown for that ornament to the "legitimate"; but in this view he was mistaken. Badger had probably never enjoyed so much distinction in his life; and his song: —

> "If you like them, why, it's nothing to me,
> But these are some things I don't like to see!
> I don't like to see!"

had already been taken up, sung, whistled, hummed by every American in Monterey and the camp. Many were the things and various that Mr. Badger didn't like to see; he had a hit at everything and everybody connected with the army from General Taylor down, and was kept shouting verse after verse until he was hoarse as a crow, and the refrain bellowed in chorus made the stanchions of the canvas roof to quiver where they stood. Badger winked, capered, and made faces with as good a will as if he had never dreamed of Hamlet; and remarking many acquaintances in the martial audience to whom he had been well known at Matamoros, cut a few original jokes, not very funny, perhaps, but much more

keenly appreciated than all his clown's classics. As, for instance, when he mysteriously accosted the ringmaster with the inquiry, Was Mr. Thomas L. Crittenden of Kentucky present? "No, sir, Mr. Crittenden is not here, sir. Mr. Crittenden has gone north with General Taylor's despatches, sir," which was true; but when the applause which the mere mention of Taylor's name always brought forth had died down, the clown, with a wonderful pantomime of relief and thankfulness, lugged out a monstrous false nose and clapped it into place on his countenance — "It's safe!" says Badger, tapping this organ happily. "It's safe!" A witticism which was received so heartily that his concluding: —

> "If you like him, why, it's nothing to me,
> But he's a young man that I don't want to see!"

was completely drowned out by the din. The Mexicans in the rear seats stared and listened, uncomprehending, jabbering among themselves; I never saw a similar gathering of their nation so uproarious even when a favorite torero took his stand to despatch the bull; we are apt to look down upon the southern races for their supposed excitability and want of self-control, but I doubt if the shoe is not once in a while on the other foot.

After the performance Burke, much interested in this development of Mr. Badger's career, went down, and finding a small boy, one of the troupe — with a withered little anxious face, and a Mexican zarape shrugged about his lean stunted shoulders over the spangles and fleshings — who was diligently selling candies at the entrance, suborned him for a few pennies to guide him to the clown's lodgings. Edward roomed in a house near by with some of his professional brethren; and all this crew of Tom Tumbles were just sitting down to their dinner when the captain arrived, Badger with his chalk-blanched face and soiled white blouse and pantaloons which he had not yet removed. He took his face out of a jug of pulque to salute the guest — "What ho, Burke! Fighting Nat,[1] hey? Come in — sit down — fetch a seat, somebody — make room for the cap-

[1] This senseless sobriquet was bestowed on Burke after the Monterey fight; and he has never since got rid of it. — N. B.

tain there between you!" Nothing could exceed his hospitality; I believe he was genuinely glad to see the other; he had heard, he said, that Burke had gone through the siege unhurt, and congratulated him warmly. The Jeffersons? No, they were not with the company; they had gone back to the States, as they intended. For himself — as you see! He introduced Burke to the others — to the India-rubber Man, to the Hindoo Juggler — who spoke English with a remarkably strong Tipperary accent for a Hindoo — to the ringmaster and Mrs. Ringmaster, the parents of the candy-selling boy — the captain met them all; and he found them, contrary to his previous ideas, most honest, kindly, and respectable people. They looked up a little to Badger who, as he was rather fond of telling, had once acted with Macready — "This was the only thing that presented itself — of course I have other positions in view, but it will take me some time to decide," he told his friend leniently, in private; "and in the meanwhile, a man must live, eh?"

Burke felt some reasonable doubts that this happy-go-lucky artist had anything secure "in view" at all, but he did not voice them. Badger and he sat together on one of the circus-chests and smoked Mexican cigars and talked an hour during the clown's scant leisure. It was at the end of the interview that the latter said suddenly, — it was the first time he had mentioned the subject, — "Guess you don't hear anything from Ducey nowadays, hey, Captain?" "Hear anything?" said Burke, a little shocked; "why, you don't know — I thought maybe you didn't know — but he — he's dead, poor fellow. That is, he's missing, it's the same thing practically; he hasn't been heard of since we took the place; it must have happened some time during the siege or right before."

"Yes, I know, I heard all that," said Badger, eying him, quite unimpressed; "but that's not what they're saying now — it's all over the camp, you know. They say he nipped somebody's pay, and vamosed with it — cleared out for parts unknown — scared blue. Why, you don't mean to say you hadn't heard that?"

CHAPTER VII

In which the American Army moves on Tampico

It was, I believe, about the last of October, and the "Army of Occupation" (which we learned from stray and belated newspapers was our high-sounding official title) had been established at Monterey some six weeks, when those first rumors of the Administration's dissatisfaction with Taylor began to circulate; a curious sort of restlessness and activity of speculation had already invaded us, everybody thinking he recognized the omens of impending change. Twice expresses arrived from Washington; General Patterson organized his brigade and marched back to Camargo. From day to day we understood that General Wool, who had had charge of an expedition into Chihuahua, had been heard from, and would join us shortly to concert some new move with Taylor. Still he did not come; and "When did you hear from General Wool?" got to be a by-word in the camp, the mere repetition of the question one of those pointless jokes by which at times the public mind appears to become obsessed, Badger's brilliant pun that Wool wouldn't come because he'd *shrink* from the journey being also repeated about as if it were the choicest possible piece of wit. Thus did we amuse ourselves in the intervals of camp duties, and three or four hours daily of battalion and company drill. Master grandson, or you other young gentlemen under whose eyes this may chance to fall, do you think we were a set of thick-skulled, spiritless fellows with our routine work and our childish play? Let me tell you that war is as dull a business as ever I heard of, for all it has furnished so many dazzling pages to history. I have stood in the breaches of a falling city, and have drawn a sword and shouted commands on the pitched field; and I have also marched all day in a chilling norther, with eyes full of sand, a blistered heel, and a ration of hardtack and raw bacon, — which of these experiences to do you suppose I

remember best? Why, the last, to be sure; believe me, it took the greater fortitude.

Early in November, we got notice definitely that the armistice agreed on at Monterey between the Mexican general and ours was formally put an end to by our government; and orders were posted for the advance of the army on Saltillo, General Worth marching first as before, Taylor following him with a small body of May's dragoons for his sole escort, according to the general's reckless habit. "Damn it, old Zack's foolhardy, that's what he is — plumb foolhardy. 'Tain't safe!" Burke overheard a private of his company exclaiming indignantly to another. On this Saltillo march, our leader received Santa Anna's answer to his message informing him of the cessation of the armistice; it was so ferociously worded as to remove any hopes General Taylor may have entertained of a speedy settlement of the difficulties between the two republics. All ideas of peace ought to be discarded, said the Mexican chief savagely, ". . . while a single North American treads in arms the territory of this republic, or while hostile squadrons remain in front of her ports!" The hostile squadrons were, indeed, remaining in front of her ports to some purpose; already at that moment Commodore Connor had taken possession of Tampico without a shot fired; we got the news a fortnight or so later, and about the same time General Wool with his column at last turned up at Monclova.

In the meanwhile and amongst all these martial expeditions and encounters, Captain Burke's private affairs had given him some little concern. There reached us one day, just before we marched, a soiled and battered and badly damaged parcel of mail, that same parcel whose loss we had mourned a couple of months earlier at the time of our movement from Matamoros; and how it had been lost and found, and what were its adventures between whiles, nobody ever clearly knew. It came, oddly enough, in company with another batch of mail which was the latest from the States; and Burke, finding a number of letters in both instalments, conscientiously read the oldest first in the order of their writing, with a smile at his own whim. They were from his partner, young Lewis; from a firm of lawyers in Cincinnati of whom Nat knew nothing, not even the names, and whose communication filled

him with an astonishment not untinged with annoyance; and from Jim Sharpless. There may even have been some others[1] whose daintiness of tinted paper and slender Italian script was badly marred by their wanderings and rough usage — but have no fear! However eagerly the captain pounced on and devoured these, the public was safe from them; Burke would not have confided their contents to any living soul at the time, and why should he now, after forty years? In the second set there was another from Messrs. Wylie & Slemm, containing substantially the same information — or *mis*information — with additional hints and offers, which Nathan put aside impatiently; and then he came upon and opened with real pleasure a letter from John Vardaman.

"—— Bravo, Nat!" it began; they had just got the news of Monterey; the despatches were in all the papers; might one of the unfeeling and unscrupulous Democrats who had helped to plunge the country into this barbarous and unjustifiable conflict, congratulate him? The doctor thought that Captain Burke was doing pretty well for a Whig, a supporter of peace, and lover of concord. "But it is nothing more than what we all thought, and, perhaps, expected of you," old Jack added seriously, after a good deal of fun-poking in the same strain; "and I hope you will come home a general, for I don't believe any man in the army will do more to deserve promotion." Burke read the words in the quiet of his little tent, reddening, touched, pleased; he wondered if anybody ever had such friends, so kind, enthusiastic, and loyal. The letter broke off here abruptly, and was resumed under another date a few days later. "I had got this far," wrote the doctor, "when some sudden call interfered; so that whatever important piece of news I was about to communicate, has gone clean out of my mind. You may have heard that old Mr. Marsh has finally retired from business. It is the strangest thing to see him on the street at all sorts of irregular hours, and hanging wistfully around the doors of offices and warehouses, which, I suppose, he was in the habit of visiting when he was in the thick of affairs. They tell me he won't even go in and sit and talk now that he has no par-

[1] None of the letters between Captain Burke and Miss Sharpless could be found. — M. S. W.

ticular errand, although his friends — or rather the sons and grandsons of his friends, as scarcely anybody of his own age is left — often invite him. 'No, no, I don't care about it, Josh, I know what it is to have people idling around in your office — their room's a deal better than their company. And let me tell you, young man, you mean well, I know, but it ain't very good business to ask me. Your father wouldn't have done it; I always had a very high opinion of your father's business head. There ain't any such men as he was around nowadays.' I overheard him saying to Joshua Barker the other day — who must be about sixty, by the way! It's rather forlorn to see the old man — makes me quite resolute to wear out rather than rust out. The business appears to be prospering as usual, without him. My sister tells me that Mrs. Ducey has recently bloomed out with: item: a splendid new barouche and span of Blue-Grass blooded trotters; item: the whole house freshly papered from top to bottom; item: a whole new set of full-length lace curtains — '*real* lace, John!' — for the parlor; and item: the Lord knows how many grand new toilettes for herself and little Miss Blake, made out of bombazine, shagreen, popeline — when the ladies go into details I am all at sea, but the most elegant and expensive materials, anyhow. By all this and other signs, I judge that Ducey must be doing exceedingly well, perhaps better than when Mr. Marsh was in the office, although that was so short a time ago. Indeed, he has intimated to several people that the old man was very hide-bound and conservative and had no idea of keeping abreast of the times; whereas Ducey means to introduce progressive modern methods, and expand the business. I know very little about business myself — I think men in my profession rarely ever do; but if I had money to invest I believe I should trust Mr. Marsh's judgment, old as he is, before William Ducey's.

"Jim and his father have at last made up their differences; ever since that experience at the Harmony Hall meeting I understand the Reverend Mr. Sharpless has shown signs of softening. I don't know how they have compromised — two such very uncompromising natures; but Jim goes to the house now. He is rather silent and uncommunicative for him. Just now he is quite full of going to Mexico —

joining the army in some unofficial capacity, as a corresponding agent for some eastern newspaper, he tells me — and will probably have told you already. Perhaps it was this move of his that hastened the reconciliation. . . ."

A letter from Sharpless in this same mail confirmed the intelligence. "Dear Nat," he wrote, "Not long after you read this, I shall be on the bounding briny, sir, — according to my present plans, and if nothing falls through, — headed for Mexico. Having withstood the guns of Monterey — 'with distinguished gallantry' — I take it you can hold up under the shock of this sudden information. I leave here for Baltimore the middle of December, and sail from there on the *Napier* the 24th; if we have any sort of luck that ought to land us in Tampico in about four weeks — or in Vera Cruz, whichever port we are headed for, I am in a pleasing uncertainty! Nobody up here knows what is going forward, nevertheless every one is perfectly confident that the government contemplates some active hostilities all along the coast, instead of this supine blockade; so that perhaps both Tampico and Vera Cruz will have fallen by the time I get this written, and we can take our choice of either. By 'we' I mean a fellow named Clarkson of the Baltimore *Chronicle*, and myself, and it is likely some other newspaper-men, editors or underlings; they are all 'stampeding' (you will observe I am practising up on the Texas vocabulary!) for the seat of war; older journalists tell me there never was anything like it seen before — in *their* young days the military authorities wouldn't have put up with a horde of non-combatants trapesing around with the army or after it, and writing home and publishing all sorts of information for the enemy to read and profit by, etc., etc. What would Wellington have said, what would Bonaparte have said, what would General Jackson have said to it, sir? I dare say the truth is the old boys never thought of this method of supplying news. Clarkson is to be paid a whacking price for articles 'from the front.' I get my expenses and a more modest wage; but the experience will be invaluable. Mexico is so big a place, and military movements so erratic, that I can't be sure of meeting you anywhere — still I am hoping. There is a great deal of grumbling about Taylor's liberality to the vanquished, and the rumor is that he is to be recalled or deposed,

and Scott sent down. I am too far away and know too little about it to venture an opinion on the terms of surrender; but, arguing from what we know of old Rough-and-Ready's character and previous actions, they would be equitable and humane.

"It is strange to think, Nat, that you have actually been under fire, and trained that deadly-sure eye on your brother-man, and stranger still to picture poor George Ducey on the stricken field. I suppose 'missing' is equivalent to 'gone for good,' isn't it? Of course the day of pillage and burning has gone by, and the harpies don't rob and murder the wounded any more; but what might not happen in Mexico? In honesty, no one could regret him, but such an end seems somehow disproportionately tragic. I went up to the house the day after the official returns were published — I hadn't the courage to face his mother sooner. It was rather ghastly to see the place very richly furbished up and ornamented — they had been doing everything over on a lavish scale lately, and were going to give a party the very night the news came. Francie was gathering up and taking away the poor wilted bunches of flowers that had been used in decoration; she came with a grave face and told me that some of her aunt's friends were there, Mrs. David Gwynne — who recently lost *her* only child, Len Andrews's wife, you know — and others. The house was quite besieged with women weeping or ready to weep. Everybody takes it for granted that this is the last of George. Francie was pale, but entirely self-contained; she doesn't make any pretence of being sorry for George, although, like the rest of us, she feels very deeply for Mrs. Ducey. I said to her that after all 'missing' wasn't as bad as 'killed' or 'wounded,' and perhaps in the next news he would have been found.

"'Uncle William says we mustn't hope for that,' she said quietly; 'he says that if the war were between two civilized countries, it might be different, but with savages like the Mexicans, you might as well make up your mind to the worst. Of course, Aunt Anne does hope a little, though — she will until she — she hears, you know. That makes it worse, *I* think. If he had been killed or wounded, she'd have been *certain*, anyhow. I — I want to hear from Nathan — from Captain Burke, I mean —' she interrupted herself, coloring

all over her little pale face — 'he'll be sure to find George; if he can't, nobody can. I shall feel sure when we hear from him.'

"Something impelled me to say, — we were alone in the big, forlorn parlor, and nobody could be scandalized by it, — 'If it had to happen, I can't help being glad that it was George and not Nat; I think George could be better spared.'

"She looked straight in front of her, with an extraordinary hardening of all her features, and said: 'Mr. Sharpless, if it wasn't for poor Aunt Anne, it wouldn't make a bit of difference to anybody. I don't know why it should be any worse to say it about a dead person than a live one — it seems worse, somehow — but it's *so*. George never told the truth in his life, and he's done some mean, contemptible things. And I don't think anything could ever change him. When he was a little, little boy he was that way. I remember crying my eyes out when I was a little girl thinking that I *had* to love George, because he was my cousin, and I didn't love him, and I couldn't *make* myself. After I grew up, of course, I found out that you don't have to love people just because they happen to be your relations. But it used to make me unhappy' — she said all this in a fiery little way very unlike her, and I believe was going on with more of it, when she seemed suddenly to recollect that she was not talking to herself, or 'having it out' with her aunt (as her manner somehow suggested; I am very much mistaken if this was not a sort of sequel to some recent family row about George), but was airing a private matter to an outsider; she stopped in a great confusion, red as a poppy, and biting her lips and looking at me shamefacedly. 'I — I beg your pardon, Mr. Sharpless, I suppose you think I'm very mean and silly to talk this way — it *is* mean, I know it — but I — I — it's so easy for me to talk to you — you always seem to understand —'

"'*Do* I, Francie?' I said, a good deal moved, and hopeful, and trembling a little, I suppose, 'you — you like to — you care to —'

"'You're just the same as a big brother, you know,' she interrupted hastily. But I wasn't going to be put off that way; it may not have been the time and place to say it, but, Nat, I couldn't hold in any longer.

"'Oh, Francie,' I said; 'you know what I mean. I love you — I've always loved you, I think. I ought not to speak about it now, perhaps, but I *must*. I love you. I want you to marry me.'

"Does all this bore you to death, old fellow? I can't help it, I feel as if I must talk to somebody. And if you are yawning your head off, why, blow out the candle, cover up the campfire, douse the glim, in short, in whatever fashion is popular in Mexico, roll up in your blanket, and go to sleep. The excitement is all over, I have done with my eloquence, there is nothing more to come, no white satin favors, no rice and old shoes, no orange-blossoms and clouds of *tulle*, no necessity for Nat Burke to go down into his jeans for a silver cake-basket — none whatever! She wouldn't have me, and cried bitterly, and was sorry for me from the bottom of her heart — well-a-day! I asked her if it was because of my free-thinking, and she cried out vehemently, No, no, she never thought about that, she didn't care what I believed or didn't believe, and Aunt Anne herself said she was right, and not to mind what people said about me. I said, 'Francie, is there somebody else?' which was not a fair question; and I felt properly punished when she sobbed harder than ever and wouldn't answer. I suppose there is; do you remember that I once thought it was you, and was quite sure of it when you began to tell me of your engagement? I had made up my mind never to ask her, because of you.

"So I came away to my lodgings, and they looked bare and empty and lonely like my life; Clarkson's letter had come and was lying on the table, which was all littered up with pipes and manuscript and dirty bundles of proofs. I used to cherish a dream of how she would come into my study, and make a delightful little fuss over the disorder and the smell of tobacco, and fall to and get me all straightened up in a tremendous flutter of skirts and ribbons — pooh! You'd be surprised how hard it was for me to give up that foolish fancy; I sat down and morosely accepted Clarkson's offer and invitation on the spot. I think I never was so weary of anything in my life as the view from this window, these lifeless streets, the faces of my fellow-boarders than whom God never made a duller lot, the sight of the wretched little

out-at-elbows youngster with ink-smudges on his face and warts on his hands who comes from the *Journal* office for my copy, and falls asleep sitting on the top step of the stairs outside my door — oh, I am sick of it all.

'I care for nobody, no not I!
And nobody cares for me!'

That last is not strictly true. I thought it a duty to write my father and mother and tell them what I meant to do — yellow fever or a stray bullet might come along and finish me down there, you know, although, of course, I didn't dwell on those dismal subjects to them. I merely wanted them to know where I was and what I was about. Father immediately sent me word to come to the house! It was the first time in ten years. I went and we shook hands, and neither one of us said a word about our ancient quarrel; it is so good to be friends we are afraid of shaking up those grisly old bones. I suppose there couldn't be a stranger reconciliation, when neither has receded an inch. We have only learned a little charity and forbearance with our advancing years; he doesn't want to cane me into Christianity any more, and I have the courtesy and common sense to behave with an outward show of respect anyhow. When I was a melancholy hobbledehoy of sixteen, I thought I must be forever contradicting and disputing, and posing him with unkindly humorous questions. I go there almost every day; it makes my mother quite pathetically happy; and I think Mary is pleased, too. You know she is very cool always and self-possessed, so of course I don't look for any display of emotion from her.

"The last I heard from you a mail-bag had been lost; let us trust that none of my valuable communications were in it. In a little while, I dare say we shall be sending and receiving messages from Mexico with the speed of light; they are trying the Electric Telegraph, and they say it's perfectly practicable even for long distances and over mountain ranges, although that seems hardly possible. They talked the other day from Washington to New York; the message was repeated at Philadelphia, I believe — but even so, the thing is almost incredible. They have a system of spelling by dots

and dashes on the machine; but no doubt after a while that will be improved on, as it wouldn't be very available to the general public, hampered by a different alphabet.

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"The above is a furious, profane gibe at Fate, couched in the Dot-and-Dash dialect! Perhaps its just as well the 'general public' can't read it.

"Your friend, the
"CONFIRMED OLD BACHELOR,
"J. S."

Burke laid the letter down. Poor Jim! thought the young man, regretfully sympathetic; and how unequally are the prizes of this life distributed! He himself, as unworthy as he was, had the desire of his heart, the love of the brightest and sweetest and most beautiful of women, a source of daily wonder and pride and happiness to him — while Jim, as good a man in every way, must be disappointed. It was strange that Francie did not appreciate what was being offered her — but no one can ever tell what a girl will like or dislike. He hoped, with a serious face, that she wasn't going to fall in love with, and throw herself away on, some worthless fellow; he frowningly ran over all the young men of her circle or whom she would be likely to know, not one of whom was half good enough for her, to his notion; and the thought stayed with him all day, with an unusual sense of worry and resentment.

It did not occupy his mind so much, however, as to interfere with his writing briefly to Messrs. Wylie & Slemm, to decline their proposal. "In the course of my legal experience," he wrote, "I have repeatedly (as was natural) encountered the names and records you mention; so that a number of the facts you have discovered were already familiar to me, and my inferences corresponded with yours. While I have no doubt that some sort of claim might be established, I have never cared to take any steps in that direction; and do not care to now. Although constrained to decline your services, I beg to assure you of my highest appreciation —" wrote Nat, with a dreadful sardonic grin — "and

remain, etc., etc." "The shysters!" he ejaculated contemptuously, as he folded up this neat rejoinder.

It was some little while before the young gentleman received any more letters, or found time to write any. Our army took the road for Victoria, where we arrived about Christmas Day of 1846, as nearly as I remember, in an overpowering heat, dust, and sunshine, after between two and three weeks of a trying march. General Quitman, who commanded on this march, took possession of the place with a good deal of military ceremony, and no resistance whatever, although we lived in the midst of alarms, and were constantly being turned out at all hours of the night and day to patrol the town, and prepare for a sudden descent of the enemy, who, under Santa Anna, were reported to be advancing in great force from the direction of San Luis Potosi; indeed, we had been somewhat harassed on the way by Minon's cavalry, hanging on our flanks and rear. The troops remained at Victoria, resting, for about a fortnight, during which time Twiggs's division with the general-in-chief came in, and also Patterson with his volunteers from the Rio Grande, the men very much exhausted, having suffered greatly from the want of water on the road. All this country to the north, however, seemed to be swept clean of Mexican soldiery; except for a brush with the guerillas now and then, nobody had encountered anything resembling armed opposition. We held what we had got; and might have been inclined to a little cockiness about our achievements, had it not been for adverse comment from home, and the disagreements between General Taylor and the Administration. These had been pretty thoroughly aired by this time; everybody had had his say, public and private, official and unofficial; General Taylor's letter to General Gaines explaining the whole circumstances of the Monterey campaign was published first in the *New York Express*, whence it travelled all over the country; the government retaliated by sending out that famous order calling attention to Paragraph 650 of the Army Regulations: "Private letters . . . relative to military operations are frequently mischievous in design, and always disgraceful to the army. They are therefore, strictly forbidden. . . ." And if you wrote any such letter for publication, or placed it beyond your

control, so that it found its way to the press, you were to be dismissed from the service!

This order, you may be sure, found *its* way to the press fast enough; the political kettle boiled over; strange to say, there was more letter-writing than ever. Colonel Jefferson Davis explained; Major-general Henderson explained; Brigadier-general Worth explained. These gentlemen had all been on the Peace Commission at Monterey, and felt it due themselves to defend the articles of capitulation. And in the meanwhile the army at Victoria heard that it was true the War Department had sent Scott down; already he had landed at the Brazos; was Taylor to be superseded, sure enough, we wondered. And what was all this concentration of forces at Tampico about? The place had fallen; we understood we were to be sent there, and also Worth's corps now at Saltillo; but for what movement, or under what general, no one knew, and there were a hundred conjectures. If personal popularity and the confidence of the entire army could have decided it, there would have been no question of the man to lead us. General Taylor could not stir a foot abroad without being surrounded, followed, hurrahed for until you would have thought the men would burst their throats. He visited the camp of the Illinois Volunteers, and the honest fellows fairly mobbed him in their eagerness to see, speak to, shake hands with, old Rough-and-Ready. His orderly rode a prancing cavalry horse, and cut so magnificently military a figure that he was mistaken at first by many for the general himself, who fared forth on a big, mild-mannered mule and wore his ancient black frock coat, and a Texan hat. Nobody enjoyed the joke more than Taylor, and when the troops finally discovered him, their enthusiasm was even greater than before. Did ever any general shake hands with a regiment of raw recruits before, and do it without the slightest loss of dignity and authority? In his plain ways, his courage and common sense, his enterprise and resolution, perhaps we all obscurely recognized whatever is best and most typical of the American character, and of that vanishing race of pioneers to which we all belonged, and felt a pride in him accordingly; and even if his military abilities had been less — it is no part of this writer's plan to discuss them — I believe we should all have liked, trusted in, and followed him.

Except on that one occasion during the attack on Monterey it was never Burke's good fortune to meet General Taylor. Before we left Victoria the captain had been appointed by General Quitman — with whom he had become very good friends — on his staff and to fill the post of military secretary left vacant by Mr. John S. Holt, who was about to return to the States; and in this capacity Captain Burke served out the war, being, I think, the only volunteer officer member of any one of the leading general's official family, as it was the custom to select their aides, etc., from the subalterns of the line regiments. By this move the captain missed forever the chance, not alone of knowing Taylor, but of taking part in the glorious engagement of Buena Vista, and winning immortal laurels thereby. He can freely boast that he might have won them — who is to deny him? Certainly not those who will have to gallop off to their libraries and search the Encyclopædia to find out where and when Buena Vista was fought, and what good came of it at last! At the time of our departure from Victoria, he was rather congratulating himself on his sagacity or good luck, for it looked as if there might be very little activity in this part of Mexico, as we now knew and the enemy knew that our movement was directed on Vera Cruz, and the interior; and to sit down in quiet at some small outpost on the Rio Grande did not at all suit with Mr. Burke's views of a martial career. On the 15th of January, when our advance had already been two days on the Tampico road, it was published in Orders that the War Department directed the return of General Taylor to Monterey with a certain few of the troops, with which he was expected to hold and defend that vast territory, possession of which had been acquired mainly by his efforts; and that we were now under the command of Major-general Winfield Scott, practically the whole of the army having been thus annexed by the latter.

It is not my place to pass upon the justice or injustice of this governmental decree; and I think posterity has already pronounced its verdict on the relative merits of President Polk and his cabinet, and Zachary Taylor. "It is with deep sensibility," he wrote, "that the commanding general finds himself separated from the troops he has so long commanded. To those corps, regular and volunteer, who have

shared with him the active services of the field, he feels the attachment due such associations; while to those making their first campaign, he must express his regret that he cannot participate with them in its eventful scenes —" and with these and other equally brave and kind and manly words the old soldier bade us farewell.

CHAPTER VIII

TAMPICO

BRIGADIER-GENERAL John Anthony Quitman, under whom Burke now came to serve, and for whom he had a great liking and respect, was at this time between forty-five and fifty years of age, of a fine erect and martial figure, and with one of the handsomest and most amiable faces ever seen. He was a native of New York State by birth, but having gone to Mississippi while yet a very young man, married, made a fortune, and attained considerable personal and political eminence there, was by now more of a Mississippian than the Mississippians themselves, as sometimes happens with these transplanted loyalties. But, indeed, the general was a man to whom any sort of moderate emotions, middling standards, halfway measures, were impossible. His enthusiastic devotion to the State and her institutions was only equalled by his enthusiastic devotion to the country at large, to the legal profession — he had been Chancellor of the State, and had an extensive practice — to the profession of arms which he was now following, to his wife, his family, his friends! Whatever General Quitman had to do, that he did with all his might and main, displaying an incredible boyish ardor, self-confidence, and eagerness. A braver man or a simpler and more generous spirit never existed; yet he flourished about his military duties like a hero of melodrama; he got his men up in line and addressed them with tremendous patriotic and stirring harangues; he wrote glorious long oratorical letters when two words of ordinary talk would have served the purpose. I remember his once describing with profound admiration and in as vivid language as if he had been on the spot that celebrated incident of the battle of Fontenoy, where the young noblemen of I do not know what splendid body of French troops saluted their opponents of the English line — "*Messieurs de la Garde, tirez le premier!*" and announcing fervently that he thought that

one of the finest chivalric scenes of history! To the rather utilitarian mind of his auditor it seemed a needless piece of rococo; but Burke and his general agreed to differ with absolute friendliness; there is something, at first sight, almost strange in the association of two such widely divergent characters, that inclines one to put some faith in that law of the attraction of opposites about which we hear people talk.

Quitman, as was natural to him when his affections were anyways engaged, greatly overestimated Captain Burke's parts and achievements; something in the younger man's sober and occasionally satiric view of men and the world pleased him by its very contrast to his own; he used to declare that for hard work and hard knocks their two careers were an exact parallel — whereas, except that both had been lawyers, nothing could have been more unlike! And while extolling openly and with a floweriness of words that made the captain to blush and squirm upon his seat, what he called the "laconic brevity" of Burke's speech, he would pronounce him to be possessed of unusual conversational powers when he chose to exert them — the truth being that honest Nat, if no such brilliant talker, was an exceptionally good listener, which has more to do with being an acceptable companion than most people suppose. He came to be the repository of all the general's past history, private affairs, his expectations, convictions, aspirations, his mercurial woes and joys. He would weep when he talked to Burke about the children he had lost, little Edward, little John — they had both died in a dreadful tragic manner after only a few hours' illness during the cholera epidemic at Natchez in '33; he kept a lock of his father's hair, the old gentleman, who was a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church, having died at the fairly ripe age of seventy-five some fifteen years before, in the odor of sanctity, and having been, I do not doubt, a man of intelligence and strong character — but few sons, Burke thought, are sentimental enough to keep a parent's memory green after this true-lovers' fashion. It touched the young fellow even while it obscurely amused him; he liked his general all the better for that picturesque attitudinizing, that freedom and fluency of talk, those eager confidences which Burke himself would have been the last man in the world to fall into; for somehow, not all of Quit-

man's plainly perceptible weaknesses and want of balance could make him less of a striking and interesting personality, a man to command respect.

On the Tampico march General Quitman's brigade — which now formed part of Patterson's division — was made up of the South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama regiments; so that Captain Burke had plenty of opportunities of becoming acquainted with the "chivalry" — it was their own expression — of those Southern States, as represented by their officers; and he found them most high-spirited and gallant young men. Some of them marched in tolerable state for militiamen, with horses, negro body-servants, and various small comforts unknown to the Ohio captain — which, by the way, they shared with whomsoever lacked, with the utmost kindness, tact, and unselfishness. The hardships of campaigning were beginning to tell on our men; by the last of January, when we reached the sea, they were ragged and nearly barefoot; they had not been paid in six months; rations were insufficient, there was a great deal of sickness, small parties of Mexican lancers or light troops constantly annoyed us. Desertions were dishearteningly numerous, yes, even from the ranks of those sons of chivalry with whom Captain Burke was now associated. If there had been anything materially better to be got by joining the enemy, one could hardly have blamed the poor wretches; but the Mexicans were worse armed and fed than ourselves apparently; their sole advantage was that they were in the country of their birth. We heard that one desperado, by name Thomas Riley, who had deserted from the 3d or 4th Infantry before the war opened, — I believe, — had gathered to himself upwards of a hundred of his fellow-deserters, and formed them into what was called (slangily) the "Brigade of Saint Patrick," from which many got the notion that these turncoats were all Irishmen — an unjust and cruel error, for we had all remarked that our Irish, or, at least, those who bore Irish names, our O'Briens, Murphys, and Flanagans, were not only the stoutest of fighters, but inflexibly loyal. One of them even trapped very cunningly a Mexican secret agent who was trying to lure away some of the men — and had succeeded more than once, alas! — with promises of money, and an officer's rank in their army.

Notwithstanding all this discontent, nothing could have exceeded General Quitman's thought and care for his troops on the march — wherein he differed notably from most of the other commanders whom Burke had the honor to know. A volunteer officer's relations with his men are, in nature, more intimate and personal than those between the regular army private and his superior; but Burke's general outdid every other in the field, volunteer or regular, in zeal for the welfare of his command. It was said that he never laid down upon his bed at night without having assured himself that every man in the brigade was in his proper place, whether on duty or at rest; and when, on our arrival within ten miles of Tampico, we were assigned a camping-ground — with that strange indifference or contempt of caution which distinguishes the American soldier — of a narrow, low-lying strip of semi-bog between a lagoon and a piece of jungle, steaming with hot moisture and foul odors, and already multitudinously tenanted by every plague-bred and poisonous insect or reptile that grows — when we were ordered to encamp here, I say, the general himself mounted a horse, rode to headquarters, and presented our case so forcibly that we were moved in a couple of days to a much higher and more healthy spot among the hills back of the city, and adjoining General Twiggs's camp on the left. The latter had reached Tampico somewhat in advance of us; they reported that General Scott, though looked for daily, had not yet arrived; the town was a wretched little hole, not in the least like New Orleans as we had been led to expect — never saw so many homely women, and beggars, and dirt, and lice in your life; it rained this way, cats-and-dogs, all the time — *you'll* see; the camp was full of Mexicans peddling pulque, or that other stuff — what d'ye call it? — muscal — and the other night the whole division got good and drunk and raised h—l for hours; it's *my* opinion Scott had better hurry up and get the army out of this, or there'll be precious little army to *get* — and, I say, Burke, there's a fellow in the town looking for you; some newspaper fellow, the place is running over with 'em, you know; tall, thin, black-haired man, I can't remember his name, but he says you're to look for him at the " Commercial Exchange."

And so on, and so on; everybody was out of money, out

of clothes, out of temper. But Captain Burke, pricking up his ears at this last intelligence, borrowed a horse from the adjutant and rode into the city, where he found the "Commercial" without trouble. Every town in Mexico seemed to have a coffee-house, hotel, or other place of public entertainment "del Comercio"; it was like the San Juan rivers, of which if there was one, I am sure there were fifty. This "Comercio" fronted the main plaza; in spite of a steady downpour of rain, the streets were crowded; one could hardly push through the archway into the commercial patio; and across the court under the arcade running around all four sides, the first person Burke saw was Sharpless, tanned with the sea-voyage, long and thin in drab linen ducks, with a cup of the thick sugary Mexican chocolate before him, two other alert-looking gentlemen keeping him company at the little round iron-legged table — one of them occupied with a note-book and pencil. Jim looked up, seeing Burke — he was very quick of eye — almost before the other saw him — "What, Nat!" "Hello, Jim!" Lord bless me, it's forty years, and I feel now the delight with which I shook his hand! The others beheld this welcome sympathetically; if it is a pleasure in a far country to meet a mere townsman, think what it is to meet a friend. One of them, when Sharpless presently introduced us, was a Mr. Kendall of the *New Orleans Picayune*, the other, Clarkson, whose name Burke had already heard.

James, far from being the disappointed, despondent lover who might have been expected, was in admirable health and spirits, and gave Burke a very lively account of the voyage from Baltimore in one of the army transports on which Clarkson had secured berths by some wire-pulling; and imitated the men being seasick crossing the Gulf with amazing fidelity and brilliancy — officers and privates quite distinct so that one could tell them apart at once! He had left everybody at home well, he said except —

"Not Mary?"

Oh, no, Mary was all right — "but, Nathan," he said with a grave face, "Mrs. Ducey looks awfully — awfully. I suppose there can't be any doubt about George, hey? Honestly, I've seldom regretted as much the loss of a valued citizen as I have his — not on his account, but for his poor

mother. She's all swathed up in crape — it looks rather pretty and striking with her fair hair — which may be some solace to a woman," said Jim, a little cynically. "But, it's the strangest thing about Francie —" he brought the name out with a slight effort, reddening through his sunburn, and carefully keeping his eyes in another direction — "she — why, she seems to have made up her mind not to even pretend for her aunt's sake to grieve for George. *She* doesn't go around in black — not a bit of it! She wears all those ribbons and bright clothes they got before they heard the news, never misses a party, and if anybody asks her about it, says right out that it's a pity for his father and mother, but she's not going to be a hypocrite and make people think she cares except for them! I think — I suspect, that is— there's been some kind of family schism about George — something he's done or said, or, — or written home, you know, Nat," said Jim, looking at his friend with an odd expression, "that's displeased Francie." Nat was silent a moment, thinking in a flash of resentment of what George might have written — then with an unaccustomed and comforting warmth at his heart, "Francie was always a loyal little friend," he said; nor did it occur to him until afterwards how irrelevant was this remark. Jim began to talk about something else.

"People say Ducey has made a great deal of money the last few months. They're certainly spending a great deal. It's funny, I never thought he was a particularly bright man, but I suppose he's just one of those fellows with a turn for business and nothing much else. I've known other successful men that were uninteresting to meet socially the same way. Old Mr. Marsh must have been a great clog on him here these last years — Ducey hints that himself."

"Mr. Marsh was the backbone of the business when I was there — of course, he's too old now," said Nathan, wondering a little dubiously at this complete reversal of popular opinion and his own past judgments. "What's Mr. Ducey been doing to make such a lot all at once? Does anybody know? Army contracts?"

Sharpless thought not, believed it was some very lucky speculations, he didn't know exactly what; he was rather vague. "Business doesn't mean much to me except pay-

ing your debts, and getting in what's owing you, Nat, you know that," he said with a laugh. "Earn a little something, and don't spend it all — that's my whole creed. I'll never be a rich man." Which was true, as the years have proved. He never quite got over the habits of his early vagabondage, saved and invested only at the insistence of his friends, and was forever lending or giving away all he had.

"You got my letter with the interview with 'Liph?" he asked presently; "naturally I haven't mentioned the matter to anybody, but, Nat, the fact is, I'm on edge with curiosity. Are you the heir to the earldom? Has the iron chest sunk in the ground forty feet due north from the blasted oak been found? And does it contain the missing will, and the other papers proving conclusively that you are your father's legal wife's son, and *not* the child of the other lady, who — ahem! — was no better than she ought to be?"

"Oh, drop it!" said Burke, grinning, yet subtly annoyed — as references to this subject generally did annoy him. "I wrote to those lawyers, and invited 'em in polite language to mind their own affairs and leave mine alone. They wanted me to put in a claim for some property — of course you must have guessed that. They even went and got an affidavit from poor old Mrs. Darce that to the best of her knowledge and belief I was Nathan Granger's grandson. I knew all about the whole thing long before they came nosing around, willing to take it up on a contingent fee, you know. Some day there's going to be a lot of trouble in all these new Western States about land titles; people are so careless about having deeds recorded. I'll bet nine-tenths of the titles in our town are clouded; there's not a man in the place, except perhaps Governor Gwynne —"

"And old Marsh — he's too sharp ever to buy any property he couldn't get a clear title to," said Jim.

"You can't tell about anybody," Burke observed oracularly, and shook his head, "at any rate —"

"At any rate you're not going to law over anything — I never heard of a lawyer that would," said Sharpless, his eyes twinkling a little. He took an extreme relish in pretending sympathy with the vulgar prejudices that attribute every sort of cunning and trickery to Burke's calling; and the latter retorted by loudly declaiming against the weakness,

folly, and corruption of the press whenever occasion arose!

The newspaper men, who now occupied Tampico in full force, waiting on the movements of the army like terriers around a mouse-trap — or, as Jim said, when this comparison was made in his hearing, more like mice around a terrier trap! — proved a great addition to army circles, an extraordinarily jolly and companionable set, mostly young men of some education but more knowledge of the world. General Quitman, upon Burke's presenting his friend, expressed himself as delighted with the new acquaintance. Perhaps Jim's political beliefs, and certainly his capacity for interesting himself in other people and their points of view, recommended him to our camp. "Mr. Sharpless being a Democrat puts him in closer sympathy, if I may say it in his presence, with us men of the South," said Burke's general, in confidence; "and as he is a journalist, I have been improving the opportunity, sir, to remove some of those erroneous impressions which he has gathered from a — er — a *somewhat* prejudiced free-state press. Of course *you* know, Captain, I refer to the siege of Monterey. Almost all the reports were in favor of General Worth, to the exclusion of some of those who also bore the heat and burden of the day. I have been treated with marked neglect by most of the writers, though victory followed where I led. It was our vigorous attack, Mr. Sharpless, as your gallant and noble young friend here can testify, it was our attack on the left that brought against *us* nearly the whole Mexican force, and drew them off from the rear where General Worth was operating," cried Quitman, entirely unconscious in the ardor of his thundering periods that this statement was as nearly untrue, or at least misleading, as any statement of a perfectly honest man could be. "But enough of this! My friends must see justice done me; I cannot. I have been silent, except under censure; I say nothing to neglect. I wrote to General Felix Huston — a lifelong friend, sir, and one of the noblest men God ever made — exposing the whole matter, and giving an accurate account of the behavior of my brigade in the actions of the twenty-first, twenty-second, and twenty-third of September — I can show you a copy of the letter — as

a literary man I should like to have your judgment of it. There was a paragraph in the *Concordia Intelligencer* — issue of November 14 — calculated to injure me — you may have noticed it?"

"I — I have to confess I don't see the *Intelligencer*, General," says Jim, who had never even heard of this publication, and who was listening with the utmost gravity and interest; "if it makes a practice of slandering our brave and able leaders, I don't regret it."

"No, I would not say that the *Intelligencer* 'makes a practice' of slandering us, as you so graphically and forcibly put it, Mr. Sharpless," said the general, gratified; "but in this case they reported, they actually reported, sir, that I approved of the armistice. I *never* approved of it — I would have cut off this hand, sir, before I would have approved of it. In my view, gentlemen, Mexico is *ours* — it is ours to dictate terms to this crushed and quivering country. Let it be ours forever — now and *forever!* Let the banner of our great republic float above this lawless and disorganized land, let the blessings of our institutions be extended to it, let the greedy talons of *England* be warded off, let the hardy American farmer follow up the invasion of war with the invasion of peace, and when he surveys this luxuriant soil teeming with every — Good Heavens, Captain Burke, is that a tarantula by the table-leg? Set your foot on it quick!"

Perhaps Burke was not sorry to have an end of the oration; he was afraid that Sharpless would misunderstand or undervalue the brave, emotional, vain, credulous, and heroic gentleman whose worst and weakest side he was now seeing. But Jim, whose judgments of men were seldom anything but just and kind, was not unfavorably moved by all these fireworks; *vidi tantum* — as he might have and John Vardaman certainly would have said; he had seen the world, and was not easily misled by appearances. He got Quitman to talking of his youthful days, when he had tramped across the mountains, a boy of nineteen or twenty, on foot, with a knapsack at his back, to teach school in the wilderness of Ohio; had studied law, struggled for a bare living, worked early and late. It was a little Odyssey of hard work, sacrifices, and high ambition. "I sold a brace of handsome pistols, cherished possessions — you know how boys are — to

buy a set of Cruise's 'Digest'; an invaluable work, as I dare say you too have found out, Burke," he said. "Are there any deer left in D—— County, I wonder? I used to hunt them in the woods all around the town — that's nearly thirty years ago, gentlemen —" He was silent a little, thinking of those times. When Sharpless rose to go, the general accompanied him to the door, invited him to come again in a very cordial way, and said earnestly at the last: "I trust you will not construe any remarks I may have made awhile ago as a complaint again General Worth, sir. That was the farthest thing in the world from my mind. No army on earth ever boasted a more daring or brilliant officer — none! I have a great admiration for General Worth, and he honors me with his friendship. I don't want you to think that I would derogate from the glory he most justly earned at Monterey and elsewhere, sir."

"I don't think it, General. Your attitude is perfectly plain and most just and natural. Honor where honor is due — that's all you ask," said Jim, neatly. They shook hands with warmth, and Quitman afterwards remarked enthusiastically to Burke what an unusually gifted, intelligent, and high-minded young man his friend Mr. Sharpless was!

Somewhere about the third week in February our new commander-in-chief, the head of the United States armies, General Scott, at last arrived, a fact which was officially announced by two or three crashing salutes from the heavy guns at the city; hearing which, whoever could get leave posted in from camp to have a look at him. In this Captain Burke was disappointed; the general stayed only two days, very busy at his quarters, seeing only his division commanders and the heads of the various departments; but during and after this visit, brief as it was, an astonishing increase in activity and energy became noticeable throughout the army. February 25 the orders were out, and we were all to go by sea, ten thousand of us, to the island of Lobos off the coast some sixty miles south, to make ready for the descent on Vera Cruz. Everybody packed up once more; the familiar cloud of gamblers, brokers, circus riders, and camp-followers of all varieties began to melt magically away, dissolve, vanish, after their mysterious habit, to reëmbody

again at our next place of sojourn. The editors and reporters bestowed themselves in any number of weird quarters for transportation; Sharpless travelling at the invitation of an officer of marines with whom he had struck up an acquaintance, on board the U. S. S. *Raritan*, which had already harbored an illustrious guest on the way from the Brazos in the person of General Scott. "What is he like? Did any of them say?" Burke asked. But Jim had been unable to get an opinion. "Everybody reports that he *gets things done*," was all he could answer.

CHAPTER IX

"And there was War Again —"

Our army, conveyed by a fleet of eighty transports arrived before Vera Cruz city and harbor the morning of March 9, 1847, and disembarked during that and the following day at a point on the shore about three miles south, beyond the range of the enemy's guns, which could only deliver an occasional ineffective fire in our direction — the Mexicans making no other attempt to dispute our presence. Nobody was hurt, no surf-boats upset, no mishap of any kind occurred, and the troops took up their positions in the exact order assigned — circumstances so remarkable according to contemporary reports and in the general-in-chief's own opinion that you might suppose no such landing had ever been effected since Noah came to anchor on the mount. Taylor's old troops of the Rio Grande were not, however, conscious of anything remarkable happening, being by this time of a proved philosophy, and made their bivouac amongst the shifting sands, congratulating themselves that accommodations were no worse. There was a high north gale blowing which kept up for a week, preventing the landing of the siege guns and heavy artillery, nevertheless a close investment was begun at once, Quitman's brigade, to that general's unbounded delight, being assigned one of the advanced positions.

Vera Cruz, an ordinary Spanish-looking city in other respects, possessed the picturesque feature of an encircling wall in mediæval fashion, was defended on the land side by the usual redoubts, etc.; and seaward by the strong castle of San Juan de Ulloa, built upon a reef of coral rock, squarely across from the town, at perhaps a thousand yards' distance, mounting upwards of a hundred guns and commanding every part of the harbor, which, by the way, was full of variegated and outlandish foreign shipping at the time of our arrival,

and continued so during the whole of the siege! Our batteries were at length got into place, and the trenches opened on the 22d, when General Scott formally summoned the city; the Mexican commander, General Morales, declining, the bombardment began; and after four days and nights of almost uninterrupted firing from both sides, Vera Cruz was unconditionally surrendered. The American loss was not more than a hundred men, so poorly did the Mexicans serve their guns, while the latter's list of killed and wounded was reported at ten times as many, exclusive of the unfortunate non-combatants shut up within the walls whom our shot and shell could not spare. The garrisons of both city and fortress — about three thousand in all — marched out with the honors of war, saluted their flag, and laid down their arms on the 29th; and the same day we took possession.

There were about this siege none of the sensational incidents nor any of that bloody and resolute hand-to-hand fighting which had marked the taking of Monterey. Burke, remembering his own experiences, and also the determined resistance and awful scenes of Saragossa and Badajoz about which he had read in Colonel Napier's history, looked for something of the same nature here, where the inhabitants were still of the Spanish blood, if somewhat diluted, and had a similar environment in this old walled city, these stout defences. Either they were greatly fallen off from the virtues of their ancestors, he judged, or they offered an example of the house which, divided against itself, shall not stand. In the midst of the siege their General Morales resigned or was deposed, General Landero succeeding him; so that Scott summoned one man, and received the surrender from another, the change not seeming to advantage them much. It is to be doubted whether there was at this time one single man or body of men in Mexico with whom our government could have treated authoritatively and securely. Half a dozen dictators or clusters of dictators had risen, reigned a brief day, been overthrown and put to flight since the war began. Ampudia, our opponent at Monterey, lay in prison at Perote, awaiting trial for the surrender of that city; Santa Anna, himself a popular idol, if all reports were to be believed, upon the losing of a battle might be in fell disgrace to-morrow. We are accustomed to the violent and groundless prejudices,

the irresolution and instability, the crazy humors of our own mob; yet we can always count with confidence on the sober common sense of the nation triumphing at last. The endless and motiveless changes, the factional quarrels equally bloody and futile of which the Mexican history of this era is full — so full that one student at least has never been able to make head nor tail out of it, although so much passed beneath his own eyes! — would be impossible to us. It was not strange that we should have looked with contempt on this half-developed race struggling after law and order with a childish idea of blind, brutish, enforced obedience, but none whatever of voluntary and manly subjection; and wondered that individuals so mild, docile, and patient as the average native should become in the mass at once so savage and so silly.

The part which Burke's general and his forces took in the siege of Vera Cruz has been described in two lines by Scott and other unappreciative historians as a brisk skirmish resulting in the driving in of the enemy's outposts — which is exactly what it was, no more nor less; but if Quitman could have forseen that posterity was to receive so light a report of these actions, what would have been his indignation! We took up a position among some sand-hills; and the Mexicans coming out against us in considerable strength with both horse and foot were obliged to retire after some sharp firing in which they were backed up by the cannon from the city, the engagement lasting, I think, about two hours. Captain Burke, riding backwards and forwards from one end of our line to the other in his quality of aide, got his share of the hard knocks this time, a bullet in the upper arm, fortunately missing the bone — the only wound he received, let me say it at once, in all his campaigning, and that not a severe one. General Quitman himself had no chance at this particular sort of glory, the enemy retreating before we could come to grips with them, something which he certainly regretted. To have battered a hole in the city wall, and stormed through it, "my brave Carolinians," "my noble Georgians" — as he was fond of calling them — at his back, would have suited him much better. And receiving about this time authentic news of Buena Vista, and the laudable conduct of "my gallant Mississippians" on that hotly contested field, he was a

good deal affected, and wished for the fortieth time that he had been with them. "The volunteer arm, however, serves under a disadvantage, Burke, under a very great disadvantage," he would say in his depressed moods; "there is so much adverse feeling among the regulars and elsewhere *higher up*, one can have hardly any hope of recognition or promotion for *us*. I went to call on President Polk in Washington after receiving my appointment to the brigadier-generalship, and I soon *saw* —" said the general, in a tone of dark significance. "I soon *saw!* Polk, sir, is a cold-hearted aristocrat, hide-bound in conventionalities — very different from General Taylor. Even *he* did not accord me the full measure of appreciation after Monterey. If a regular officer of corresponding rank had had his horse shot under him, would it have been overlooked? But my name does not even appear once in the despatches. As to the major-generalship, I think of it no more. After all, it suffices for a man to feel that he has done his duty. The plaudits of the multitude are naught to us," said the general, with a sigh.

He was, nevertheless, as susceptible to the plaudits of the multitude as many another honest gentleman and brave man; and notwithstanding his disclaimers, the major-generalship for which he longed — and which, indeed, he thoroughly deserved — was rarely out of his thoughts. Burke liked him none the less for that stout ambition; the young fellow was conscious of certain aspirations of his own, although I do not think they ever caused him one-tenth the anxiety and the heartburnings he observed in his superior. Both general and aide were by no means ill-pleased when the commander-in-chief, a few days after the fall of Vera Cruz, despatched Quitman's brigade with a squadron or so of regulars and a section of a field-battery against the town of Alvarado a little farther down the coast, this movement to be executed jointly with a part of the naval force under Commodore Perry. Off we went in high feather — but, alas for glory! In this expedition we were fated to emulate the king of France and his fifty thousand men. Within fifteen miles of Alvarado, after a two days' march, there came a note from Mr. Midshipman Temple of the *Scourge*, ship of the line, to inform us that the spiritless Mexicans had already surrendered the town without a shot fired to Commander Hunter of that

vessel, upon his appearance before their harbor, and that nothing was left for the land forces to do but to hold it until further orders! "You're getting 'em dealt out from the bottom of the pack!" said a journalist friend of Captain Burke's, with a quite diabolical grin, observing the downcast faces of the officers. Sharpless had attached himself to the column in company with a Mr. Moses Beach of the *New York Sun;* and both gentlemen performed very creditably as amateur campaigners, marching and camping with the best of us, and writing prodigious long accounts home to their respective papers, which they managed to get mailed somehow wherever we were.

The brigade marched back to Vera Cruz within the week, reaching there after the main body of the army had set out towards Jalapa; and our ill-luck still held. For although we pursued them hot-foot, almost without rest and entirely without any kind of transportation, the men carrying their knapsacks, ammunition, and seven days' rations on their own shoulders, we only got up in time to hear the booming of the last guns at Cerro Gordo. The enemy were in full retreat; the castle had fallen; Santa Anna, Almonte, Canalizo, all the heroic Mexican chieftains had taken to their heels, except General Vasquez, who was killed in the assault, and half a dozen other generals who were prisoners; our General Shields had been shot through the lungs and was thought to be dying; Twiggs's division stormed the heights, Worth's was in pursuit of the demoralized fugitives — and where was Quitman on this splendid day? It was a bitter pill which not even the intelligence of his major-general's appointment, so ardently coveted and received a few days later, could help down!

As we advanced, the heavily fortified position of La Hoya with all its artillery and works was abandoned without a blow struck; and on the 22d of April Worth and his division took possession without resistance of the town and fortress of Perote, the latter strong enough, one would have thought, to have held out indefinitely against double our numbers. About a fortnight later the American army entered Puebla, and we stacked arms and laid down to sleep in the public square of that city surnamed — and misnamed — "of the Angels."

We stayed here, awaiting reënforcements, until the first part of August, to the great restlessness and discontent of those amateur tacticians at home, who had been so ready with their criticism at the time of Taylor's delay on the Rio Grande. Captain Burke, who now considered himself a veteran, looked back upon those weeks at Matamoros the summer before with pity and wonder at his own inexperience, his naïve ideas. Our friend Nat thought that he had gone through a good deal, as much as falls to most men, since then; he had faced an enemy's fire, and snapped a trigger himself; he had tramped weary miles; he had seen wounds and disease and death overtake many a better man than Nat Burke. Here he stood alive and well and roaming about the streets and churches of the City of the Angels, not being treated in altogether angelic fashion by the señoritas from whom presumably it got its name, in spite of the painstaking Spanish compliments which he and his friend Sharpless addressed to them. We drilled early and late at Puebla; we visited Cholula, the pyramid, and toiled up its steep road to the church at the top that took the place of the awful sacrificial temple of the Aztecs; and speculated and guessed in vain over its forgotten builders; and dickered with the natives for the grim little stone idols they dug up among the rubbish along its disordered slopes. It was a pleasant time; and I am sure Captain Burke wrote home reams of poetical descriptions to somebody, though he never cut out much of a figure as a poet. He used to climb, for this purpose, to the flat roof of the house where we were quartered, of an evening, whence in the semitropic dusk under vivid stars we could still see the white summits of the two mountains that looked from the other side, we were told, upon the "City" of Cortez and Montezuma — Captain Burke found the scene most inspiring. One of the numerous families lodging around the patio below kept a coop or two of chickens on the roof; and everybody hung out the wash there, so that it was not so romantic a locality as the reader may have imagined. Yet Burke fancied it; he made himself quite at home among the poultry and the flapping wet sheets; and a pair of Mexican mothers who came and sat there with their babies for the evening coolness got used to his presence, and even welcomed him with shy smiles.

These were not, however, the only letters Burke wrote. No, indeed; he was very busy with his pen a good part of the time on his superior's correspondence. It soon became apparent to some of us that major-generalships, like other prizes, are not infrequently a sort of Dead Sea fruit, apples of Sodom fair to look upon but a great disappointment to the palate. Burke's general for a while appeared to be rapidly nearing or already in a position where he would, indeed, have been that young man's general, but the general of nothing and nobody else! The term of service of four or five of the volunteer regiments being about to expire, they were to be sent home; Major-general Patterson was already without a command and had started for New Orleans, and General Quitman presently found his troops reduced to two regiments, and himself expected to receive orders from Worth who was as yet only brevetted to the same title, and whom Quitman supposed he ranked. A man of much less spirit and intelligence than Quitman would have resented these infringements of his rights and dignities; it can be imagined in what a strain of eloquence the general assailed his superiors. He dictated letter after letter to his military secretary, striding about the room at his headquarters, fuming, scowling, and vociferating. . . . "My juniors in rank, entitled only to *brigades*, are in command of *divisions*, consisting of five and six regiments each. This army would present the singular spectacle of brigadier-generals commanding divisions, colonels and lieutenant-colonels commanding brigades, and a *major-general* commanding *less* than a brigade!

"(Paragraph there.) I have to call the attention of the general-in-chief — (No, scratch that out, Burke, I won't say that) — I will not at this time present my views of the humiliating position. . . ." and so on while the aide labored after him through a dozen argumentative sentences, wondering if the general-in-chief — to whom Quitman always addressed these memorials ceremoniously in the third person — would ever find the time or patience to read them.

"Why don't you go and see him yourself, General, and have it out? That would save time, wouldn't it?" he once ventured; but Quitman frowned away the suggestion.

"The question is too serious to be presented otherwise than in strict accordance with military forms and usage, Captain

Burke," he said severely. And so, after he had written out a fair copy — and another for reference — Nat, with a solemn exterior, himself carried and presented it to General Scott, seeing his own general's anxiety that so valuable a document should run no risk of loss. As army headquarters were around the corner only a step away, there would not have been much danger of this happening; and our commander, to tell the truth, did not welcome his subordinate's letter with signal respect or attention. "I have no leisure for a laborious correspondence with the officers I have the honor to command, and who are near me," he wrote in answer; and, in fact, said as much rather impatiently in Burke's hearing. He had been engaged upon a literary effort of his own, a proclamation to the Mexican people, reviewing the success of our arms, and urging a speedy settlement — "Mexicans! The past cannot be remedied, but the future may be provided for. Repeatedly have I shown you that the government and people of the United States desire peace, desire your sincere friendship —" these rotund sentences penetrated to the emissary as he waited with Quitman's letter — it was the second one — in the anteroom. General Scott kept much more state than our other commanders; the rough-and-ready style had quite gone out; and he never appeared even on informal occasions in anything but the most rigid regimentals — no slouch hats, bandannas, and cotton ducks for *him*. When Captain Burke was shortly ushered into the august presence and beheld for the first time the commander-in-chief close at hand, over six feet of him, all glorious with epaulets and buttons, with thick waving leonine gray hair, with his strong lined face, and what I have no doubt the general himself would have been pleased to hear called his "eagle glance" — I say, when Nat was thus introduced to General Winfield Scott, his knees should have smitten together, and his teeth chattered in his head. Nevertheless, he managed to keep a tolerably cool countenance, saluted, handed in his letter and stood at attention while the general accepted it, not quailing at all, nor swaggering either (I hope) beneath the species of casual glower with which he was favored.

"Oh — ah — Captain Burton, I believe?" says General Scott, negligently; "from General Quitman — yes, I've had two or three from him already — " with which he tossed it

unopened on the table, turned his back on Burke, and went on dictating. "Cease to be the sport of individual ambition, and conduct yourselves —" were the last words the captain heard as he went out of the door — with a rather red face, I dare say.

Of course the general-in-chief was extremely busy at this time on highly important affairs; his every action, for that matter, was of importance in the eyes of General Scott, whether it was eating "a hasty plate of soup" or directing a campaign. He was a very brave man, an able administrator, undoubtedly one of the greatest, if not the greatest, military genius this country has ever produced; and he had before this date performed many difficult and brilliant feats in making both war and peace, which he was quite willing the world should know about — even if he had to tell them. He had — — and deserved — the utmost confidence of all under him from the highest to the lowest; whether their affection also, I cannot say. It is not necessary to a general's success that he should be liked by his troops. It is not even necessary that he should be liked by anybody. Witness General Scott's own account of the frightful odds in the way of personal prejudice against which he always had to contend; throughout his long career he was eternally at loggerheads with some base critic of his acts from the time when, as a young man, he was suspended from the army for a few months because of careless or insubordinate talk about his superiors, to his recall before the military court at Frederick to answer charges made against him in Mexico. Never was a great man so persecuted by arrogant Presidents, by jealous brother officers, by spiteful underlings, by an ungrateful public. He has told us all about it in his autobiography, and surely he ought to know! Is it anything to wonder at that Mr. Burke should have displayed an equal narrowness of mind with this raft of enemies? He did not appreciate the general; he wondered that so much ability should be so vain and pompous; he resented Scott's later patronage as much as his first incivility; and, finally, although a good Whig, he voted the Democratic ticket in 1852 when Winfield Scott was the former party's candidate.

General Quitman was one of those few who never maligned the commander-in-chief, nor caballed against him, as even that much-abused gentleman admits. But, in truth, Burke's

general, who was the most loyal, high-minded, and kind-hearted of men, would have sacrificed all his prospects and submitted to much greater injustice rather than stir up any kind of open and discreditable dissension in the army. Although he did, unquestionably, rank General Worth, he gave up that point gracefully and modestly with hardly a word; and with all his ambition and his restless courage consented to remain at Puebla in his anomalous position without a suitable command until at General Scott's convenience and upon the arrival of the fresh levies, a new distribution was made by which he was assigned to the Fourth Division, consisting of volunteer regiments from New York, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina, and a detachment of U. S. Marines. The 8th of August we moved on Mexico City.

(The editor freely confesses that she sees nothing "vain" or "pompous" in General Scott's manners on the above occasion; nor anything elsewhere to warrant the sarcasms General Burke so liberally bestows on him. It is strange that a man of Burke's character should have taken undying offence upon so trivial a cause; that he did is abundantly evidenced not only in this passage, but at almost every reference he makes to Scott. He seems to have been not ashamed but uneasily aware of this small prejudice; and clears his conscience once in a while by a few words of studied and perfunctory praise. — M. S. W.)]

CHAPTER X

Contains Some hitherto Unprinted History of the Mexican Campaign

During the following weeks Captain Burke, whatever his personal prejudices, would have been obliged to admit that our army under the new head was, as a whole, regulars and volunteers, old levies and new, a much more efficient, skilfully handled, rapid-moving, ready, and steady organization than that which the young gentleman had first honored with his company and support at the beginning of this war. General Scott had the same means and a good many of the same men as General Taylor, the same country and foe, the same harassing departmental instructions and misunderstandings, the same sudden and critical needs, obstacles, emergencies — where and in what was the improvement? I do not know; I cannot say that we were any better drilled or cared for — yet unquestionably we were a better army. We had put unbounded confidence in Taylor, a plain-spoken man, of quiet habits, and not particularly distinguished appearance; and we felt precisely the same confidence in Scott who went about in a prodigious martial array, orating, dictating, filling the air with sound and fury, magnificent and imposing in all the buttons, fringes, plumes, and gilt trumpery his uniform could possibly accommodate. We cheered him, too, when our general pranced forth at the head of his staff; we admired and respected him, gold braid and all. We even read his proclamations; and the minor generals or officers who were sometimes invited to sit at his august table and share his dinner, laughed at his jokes, and listened to his stories about Lieutenant Winfield Scott, Captain Winfield Scott, Major Winfield Scott, Colonel Winfield Scott with deference, and, what is more, with a real interest. For they were true; they were true reports of great and unusual achievements. They lost nothing by the hero's telling; General Scott never spared us a word that he had uttered nor his most minute

act; and after all, considering the facts, I never knew a man who had a better right to blow his own trumpet. Mercy on us, what a solo did the general perform on that instrument! He had always had the deciding word in every argument, the final repartee in every contest of wits, the most prominent and difficult rôle in every dilemma. It was easy for his audience to see — even if attention had not been called to it — that such a man with such abilities would have shone in any career — how lucky that he had chosen the military! He could discuss diplomacy with the Administration, law with General Quitman, letters with Mr. Sharpless (whose company he rather affected; most men liked Jim), equally versatile, facile, and luminous. And both these latter, who were as different by nature as any two human beings could well be, listened to him with an attention profoundly enthusiastic on Quitman's part, slightly amused, but always interested on Jim's.

"Of course, the old fellow is tremendously cock-sure and arrogant, I know that, Nathan," he said in private moments; "but what if he is? What if he does blow around? By Jingo, he's got something to blow about. He's almost invariably *right;* he's sane and just with all his gasconading. He's a big man in spite of it. It's extraordinary, such a character; nobody could imagine him — he'd be unbelievable in a book, or I'd like to put him in one."

"With all my heart — put him in a book, do!" said Burke, rather dryly.

"Put him in and keep him there, hey?" said the other, and laughed. "Don't be sarcastic, Nat, it doesn't suit you. Sometimes, do you know, I think you might be a tolerably good hater, if it ever came into your head to dislike anybody — oh, no — " he added and laughed again, as Burke opened his mouth to object — "oh, no, I know very well that we don't *dislike* our commander-in-chief — of course not! — and in any case we wouldn't permit ourselves to criticise him. What, criticise our superior officer to an outsider? Never! And anyhow, here lately we have been looking rather gloomy and down-in-the-mouth. What's the matter, Nat?"

"Why, nothing, nothing at all. I don't know why I should look gloomy, I haven't anything to be gloomy about," said

Burke hastily, and wincing a little under his friend's scrutiny. "Heat, vermin, touch of malaria, maybe. I wish these infernal Mexicans would stand up for once and fight it out, and let us get the business over and done with!" he burst out in an impatience and irritation wholly foreign to him. He got up restlessly and walked to the open canvas flap of the tent. They were in camp at a place called, I think, Buena Vista, a hacienda and village about halfway down amongst the mountains approaching Mexico City; it was on the ancient road that Cortez took, very little changed since his day. A great deal has been said and written about the beauty of this capital seen from a distance, a great deal about fairy spires, crystal air, Popocatepetl exalted among the clouds, the surrounding lakes like fallen stars, and so on; it must be owned that Mr. Burke, being, perhaps, a little out of sorts or temper, was not much impressed by these scenic effects. Buena Vista — Beautiful View, indeed! He surveyed it sourly. The village was a sordid little group of adobe huts, pullulating with flea-bitten dogs, donkeys, babies, men and women; we were as yet miles from the city, and its fairy spires were invisible to any but the eye of romance. The lakes acquired some importance — but no beauty — from being almost the only water, except that which fell from the heavens, we saw in our Mexican journeyings; the vegetation was the contorted growth of the tropics, unwholesomely green or bleached to powder, studded with fantastic flowers, heavy with tasteless fruits, unfamiliar, unkind. There was a sort of goblin monstrosity about the landscape with its unnatural jumble of altitudes and temperatures. Oh, for one glimpse of the hills of home! It was August and even the hills of home would have been more or less parched and dusty, the streams half dry, the air lifeless — but Nathan did not remember that.

"Seems as if we hadn't had any letters for a long while, doesn't it?" said Jim casually — not so casually, however, but that Burke darted a quick, almost a suspicious glance at him. The mail from the States had come less than two weeks before; he wondered if Sharpless could have noticed anything — could have noticed, for instance, that there was no letter from Mary, nor had been since — since how long? Nat averted his mind; he did not want to know. Instead,

that mail had contained, a good deal to the young man's astonishment, a letter for him from Miss Clara Vardaman. The thing had never happened before, and Nathan, who would not have dreamed of soliciting the lady's correspondence, was proportionately surprised at her offering it; Miss Clara was an embodied convention, a kind of walking Manual-of-Etiquette for spinsters; for a moment he feared some catastrophe — the doctor might be ill. No such thing; John was in good health, Miss Vardaman herself was in good health, everybody was healthy and prospering; she hoped it was the same with him, and rejoiced to think he had escaped the hazards of this dreadful war so far, and, if he would let her say it, with *so much honor*. She was following the movements of the army with the greatest interest. A great deal got into the papers, and was circulated about in *other ways* that was *not true*. But one could always tell. She made it a point *not* to *believe* all the *silly* and *terrible* stories she heard, and John said she was quite *right*. *Seeing* was *believing*, and she did not mean to rely on anybody's judgment but her *own*. There was really no news in town. It was a little out-of-the-way for her to write to him; but she thought he might be lonely so far away from home. And she was *always* his *attached* and *faithful* friend, Clara Vardaman.

Burke had read the letter through perplexed and a little touched; there was nothing in it; it was a sudden and rather uncalled-for expression of good-will. She thought he might be lonely; well, Miss Clara was always kind, and if this particular species of kindness seemed to him quite out of her character, it was none the less pleasant and grateful; and what did he know about women's characters, after all? he finished with a whimsical sigh. "No news is good news, anyhow. One always hears the calamities too soon," Jim went on, exaggerating the casual tone perhaps. "I — I was wondering if at home they had any inkling — if poor Mrs. Ducey could possibly have heard anything about George, you know."

"Hey? About George?"

"Why, yes. Pshaw, Nat, the whole army knew about him there at Monterey; half a dozen different men have spoken about it to me. They all say it's never happened in our army

before, an officer regular or enlisted, to desert — Benedict Arnold on a small scale, that's how they look on George, only not so dangerous —"

"I should think not," said Burke, somewhat amused. "If George did desert, it wasn't to go over to the Mexicans — not willingly, anyhow. He just wanted to get away where there wouldn't be any fighting. Very likely the poor fellow's dead by this time — he couldn't go home — he couldn't take care of himself. Let him be. He wasn't much good, but he wasn't much harm either."

"Wasn't he?" said Sharpless, hesitating and flushing; "I — I don't know about that, Nathan." Burke turned around quickly, and for an instant they looked at each other. Neither had ever touched this subject before, near as they were together in spirit; pride, loyalty, *noblesse oblige*, a decent reserve, — call it what you choose, — some feeling had kept them both from questions.

"George wrote home a long, scandalous story, a — a vile story about you and some woman, Nat," said Sharpless, answering his friend's look with a hot and shamed face; "he wrote to his mother and I don't know who else. It went all over town. People love to talk about a thing like that, somehow — even when everybody knows that George Ducey is a born liar and no earthly account, and they wouldn't listen to anything else he told under oath —" he spoke with hurried and broken phrases, suffering far more, I think, in this revelation than Burke, who had perhaps unconsciously steeled himself against it.

"Do they believe it?" Nat asked, quite calmly.

Sharpless made a gesture of helplessness. "Nathan, I don't know — people are so — if it had been anybody but you, any other young fellow, somebody who hadn't always been so steady and upright and — and *straight*, I believe on my soul they wouldn't have paid one-fourth as much attention to it! But *you!* It seemed to make a particularly choice morsel for every cursed busybody in the place. *Believe!* You can't tell what people believe — they like to talk, anyhow. I — I don't think Miss Blake believed it —" said Jim, evading the other's eyes. "She — I — naturally we couldn't speak about it — it's shameful for a girl like her to have to hear such a thing, but of course the older women

all think it's their *duty* to warn the young ones. Women are that way, you know. I think it's likely Francie didn't understand all of it. But from the way she spoke to me about George — from various things she's said, I'm sure she didn't believe it."

He paused apprehensively; it was doubtless in his mind, as it certainly was in Burke's that the next question might very well be, Did his sister Mary believe it? And whether it was supreme confidence or a torturing distrust that kept that question back, Nathan himself could not have told.

"They hadn't stopped pawing it over when I left home," Jim went on after a minute's silence. "You've got to being a kind of public character with us, you see, Nat, — 'Fighting Burke' and all that, you know. I suppose you have to expect to be talked about. It doesn't make much difference to the men; good or bad, we take one another pretty easy; we've got to fadge along. But the women — you'd have to demonstrate by every species of proof known to the human race that the report was without even the slightest foundation before they —"

"Oh, it has a foundation," said Burke, grimly; "it has a solid foundation. If I tell you —"

"I don't ask you to tell me anything, Nat!"

"But I'm going to tell you —" Burke said; and he did, the whole poor story without reservation. "You see how it was; you see there wasn't any getting out of it, even if I'd wanted to," he finished. "I have to take care of Nance, no matter how people look at it. I knew that from the start, as soon as I found out the poor girl had gone all wrong — I knew what we'd look like to outsiders — to the world at large. There isn't any explaining — how in the name of Heaven could you give any explanation? It wouldn't be in Nature for anybody to believe you. It's perfectly reasonable for George Ducey or anybody else to draw the worst sort of inferences. Jim, I had to make up my mind one way or the other, right then and there; would I take Nance or leave her? And I don't see how I could have acted any differently; and any man on earth would have done the same —"

"I don't know whether they would or not," said Sharpless.

"I did hope there wouldn't be any talk," said Burke,

honestly; "I cringed whenever I thought of that. But now it's all out, why, I've just got to stand it, that's all. If one or two people like you and Jack Vardaman and — and — if you believe in me, why, it's not so hard. And if I find Nance once more, I'm going to keep on doing what I can for her, even if no respectable woman ever speaks to me again. It's a queer kind of false position I'm in — but I guess I'm not the first man — I can stand it."

The advance of the American army, all this while, proceeded surely, it may be, but by far too slowly to suit Burke's general, who would have been "thundering at the gates of Mexico," to quote from his own flaming periods, long before this, had he been in charge of the expedition. It is only just to say that Quitman's own troops were in admirable condition, for he looked after them with a parental zeal, and being almost all young, hardy, adventurous fellows might indeed have been pushed forward in a much more brisk and brilliant manner. But the commander-in-chief seemed singularly blind to their merits, or else, as Burke shrewdly suspected, that very daredevil temper they shared with their leader appeared to Scott desirable anywhere except in the advance of his army. At any rate he kept us in our position towards the rear of the line of march with a tenacity of purpose which Quitman alternately set down to personal dislike or distrust, to lack of military skill, to the jealousy of some one brother general, to an infamous cabal among all of them, — nothing was too far-fetched for him; if it was a little comic, it was also a little distressing to behold this high and hasty spirit so fretted by restraint. Fortunately his military household furnished a handy and economical safety-valve, or nobody knows where the general's resentment might have carried him.

"You may talk as you please, Burke," he would storm at his aide — who sat by in entire silence — "you may talk as much as you please, nothing will ever persuade me that there isn't something going on *under the surface.* It's too deliberate, it's too persistent, this keeping me in the background. Somebody's got at the general and misrepresented us. Heavens! When I think that he may entertain the idea, he may actually have been brought to believe that my

splendid South Carolinians, descended from Revolutionary sires, soldiers from their very cradles, sir, with a God-given instinct for fighting, ready to pour out their blood to the last drop for their country —"

"And the Pennsylvania and New York regiments, too, General —"

"Yes, yes, of course — far be it from me to discriminate among my gallant fellows!" said Quitman, hastily; and, indeed, I am sure he had no such intention, but "my brave Second Pennsylvanians" would have been something of a mouthful even for him; "but when I think that maybe Scott believes they can't be *trusted* in the field, I tell you, it makes my blood boil. Yet why doesn't he give me a post of honor, if not from some such feeling? It's a piece of unjustifiable tyranny. Are Pillow's men any better than mine? Are Worth's? I'm willing to concede they may be better commanders, though they've neither one done one single iota more than I towards the success of our arms throughout the war — but let that pass. Only why give them all the opportunities? Why not let me have a chance?"

And so on, and so on. This was the burden of the general's talk from Puebla across the mountains, from the hacienda of the Beautiful View to Chalco, which we reached somewhere about the middle of the month, as I recollect; during the succeeding movement to San Augustin — a frightful march, across interminable fields of broken lava rocks like the bottom of an old volcano, which I have since been told it really was — his spirits began to raise a little. We were now within ten miles of the capital, the divisions were so separated that for the moment nobody could strictly be said to be in advance, the mighty fortifications of *El Peñon* — which, as it turned out, however, were never attacked — were in full sight, the plains between us and the city were alive with Mexican horse and foot, there was hourly expectation of a big engagement, and it was apparent that the whole strength of the army must be called out.

In spite of this promising beginning, will it be believed that our unfortunate division commander was doomed to another disappointment? All day (the 19th) from where we were camped in the little town of San Augustin and in the cornfields round about, we could hear the artillery on our right

where (as we understood) Worth was attacking the first of the fortifications on the Acapulco road; there we lay in reserve and listened to it! At this place the Mexicans had posted a battery of over twenty guns, we were told; they were in great force under General Valencia; Santa Anna himself was not far away at San Angel where they had fortified a convent. The fire grew heavier towards evening; our New York and Carolina regiments under Shields were at last ordered forward; night closed in with a drenching cold rain; and a rumor reached us that the position was to be stormed at daybreak. It was the bloody battle of Contreras that we were witnessing, although none of us knew it, while Burke's general fumed in inaction at headquarters, and his aide rode hither and thither with messages.

True enough, the cannon opened again very viciously at dawn; and in about an hour or so, to the great relief and delight of everybody, although it augured not too well for the progress of the battle, there came an order for the rest of the division to advance. It was Mr. James Sharpless who brought it, mounted on a stray artillery horse, without any saddle, himself picturesquely wreathed in mud, a bloody bandage on one wrist, his gaunt face grinning out from under an infantryman's fatigue-cap.

"Good Lord, where have you been?" said Burke, aghast at this apparition. The last he had seen of Jim had been early the day before when in company with another enterprising newspaper correspondent, he was starting to climb the belfry of San Augustin church for a more extended view of the field of battle. "I thought you were safe in bed, or somewhere all this while!"

"It's all right — give me some of that coffee!" said Jim, dismounting stiffly. "It's all right — I volunteered with General Shields when I saw 'em starting for the front yesterday afternoon. That is to say, I just went along — he said I could. I was carrying orders all yesterday evening — I believe I came in pretty handy. D'ye know a man named Lee — he's in the Engineers, Captain Robert Lee — d'ye know he and I are the only men that got through to headquarters last night? I don't know how many were sent — ever so many. Let me tell you what the general did — General Shields, I mean — he spread us all out this morning

— we've been in that stony place they call the *Pedregal*, you know — he spread us all out all over, and we built fires, and kicked up a big racket as if there were five times as many of us, so as to give the Mexicans a good scare, while Smith got up with his fellows and took 'em in the flank and rear! Oh, I'll bet we've got 'em doubled up by this time, Nat, I'll bet we've doubled 'em up!" He was tremendously excited, like a boy, crowing, jubilant.

He was right, it presently appeared; we had doubled 'em up; already had that business been completed, and the enemy were scurrying from behind their works, before the reënforcements could reach our troops. And, alack, instead of being allowed to press on and take part in the movement on Cherubusco, the next object of attack, we were peremptorily ordered to return to our inglorious duty of standing guard over the stores and wounded. "By-by! I'm off!" said Sharpless, when he heard this news; and in spite of remonstrances, sped incontinently away. For once our young officers — and old ones, too — envied him his irresponsibility. "Damn your reserves!" old Colonel Morgan had said on receiving word from General Pillow that such was to be his portion, and we echoed him from the bottom of our hearts. Quitman's staff rode back in glum silence behind their glum general. "This proves that General Scott's animus is directed solely against me — against me and nobody else, Burke," he said gloomily; "I intend to have an understanding — an explanation. Face to face — this is no time for formalities or written evasions! — " something which his secretary was rather glad to hear, remembering the general's prowess as a letter-writer.

All to no purpose were these ferocious statements, however. Quitman returned from army headquarters (which were also established at San Augustin, not far from our own) defeated, incoherent with anger and impatience; and at this opportune moment a petition came in to him from the officers of our corps of Marines, pathetically representing that they had left their regular line of service to join our division of the land forces, and felt themselves entitled to some part in the action!

"Good G—d, what do they want me to do?" yelled out Burke's general, flinging the document on the table in a

fury; "I'm not allowed to move, myself! We're all dummies, figureheads, non-combatants, jumping-jacks — that's it, jumping-jacks, and you can tell 'em that from me, Watson," he added to the astonished colonel of Marines who had brought the request; "tell 'em we're not to budge till the commander-in-chief pulls the wires. We're to sit here, and listen while our fellows are being killed, being butchered, by G—d, by a horde of slavish Mexicans, and we can't raise a hand to help 'em!" Tears of rage and mortification stood in the honest gentleman's eyes; he stormed about the room, pouring out his grievance. "I commanded myself, Burke, I was temperate. I said to the general that his orders detailing me to guard this place had cast a gloom over my division. He said my language was unmilitary! *Language was unmilitary* — damnation! Was that an answer?"

"Yes, but he said more than that, didn't he, General?" suggested the aide, feeling, notwithstanding his own disappointment, a strong desire to laugh.

"Oh, rest easy, he said enough and more than enough! I told him flat that we had been kept in the rear since Vera Cruz, or, at least, never in any position where we could get any credit. Then he got very much excited and said he meant always to place his strongest divisions in front, no matter who commanded them! That shows, Burke, that shows it was just as I suspected; he hadn't any confidence in us — in me," said Quitman, who had, as I have said, suspected half a dozen other things besides. "I was perfectly calm — as calm as I am now, talking to you. I told him that there were others besides himself who prized their own reputations and characters, and that I was one of them; that his orders allowed me and my men no chance for distinction, and that he would have to pardon my determination not to sit down supinely under such neglect!"

Burke, for all his dislike, felt a twinge of sympathy for General Scott, although, indeed, it was abundantly evident that nobody could be better able to get along without sympathy than that gentleman. So his orders were obeyed, he probably cared very little how they were received; and brushed General Quitman, or any other brave and high-spirited man out of his way as indifferently as he would have a fly. The quality may not be particularly agreeable in a

man, but even Burke must acknowledge that it was invaluable in a commander.

We stayed where we were; the fighting rolled off to the north where they said the enemy were making a last desperate stand at Cherubusco. It was three or four miles away, completely out of sight, but the cannonading incessant and much louder than the day before; they said that, excepting ourselves, the entire forces of both sides must be engaged. The streets had become one huge hospital; all day the sad procession of wounded filed through — with enough of "my gallant" New Yorkers and Carolinians, one would have thought, to have satisfied our general that his command had not been overlooked. Shields's brigade had behaved with the greatest resolution, and suffered severely both in the Contreras engagement and afterwards. In the late afternoon reports began to come back of astounding successes for our army — the Mexicans were cut to pieces — our troops were at the city gates — we had made a clean sweep of all the defences — we had taken acres of cannon, tons of ammunition, scores of flags, prisoners by the hundreds — Santa Anna himself was in our hands — no, Santa Anna was killed — no, he was running away, wooden leg and all, with the remaining few Mexicans whom we had not slaughtered — Hurrah!

Out of all this wild talk emerged the certainty of a great victory — of more than one victory, in fact, for on that day our troops fought five successive engagements, at different points, quite separate one from another and each one an attack on strong entrenchments against an enemy in every case outnumbering us, sometimes by as many as three to one. The prisoners and prizes, as we presently found out, were hardly exaggerated; and in one instance, at least, it was true that the Mexicans were driven back and pursued up to the very defences at their city gates, Captain Kearney at the head of his company of dragoons (not hearing or not choosing to hear the recall) having charged them at full speed up to the outworks of the *Niños Perdidos*, where this gallant officer was severely wounded. It has repeatedly been stated since, and Burke heard it at the time from many who had taken an active part and were better able to judge than he, that the battles of the 19th and 20th of August

left the enemy temporarily so shattered and demoralized, we could have entered and taken the city the evening of that second day almost without further opposition — certainly a great saving of time and bloodshed. But lo, at this supreme moment, General Scott, in the face of Taylor's experience at Monterey, consented to Santa Anna's proposals for an armistice! I do not feel myself in a position to criticise this action; he doubtless had his reasons for trusting to Mexican promises, listening to Mexican peace-talk, and believing Mexican representations, all of which had been amply demonstrated to be perfectly unreliable time and again. But what man on earth knew as much as General Scott? Or what man on earth could advise him?

Captain Burke — who, like a great many others at the time, had only a very confused idea of what was happening outside of his own immediate observation — returning to quarters late and weary that night, encountered there, much to his peace of mind, his friend Sharpless, for whom he had felt considerable anxiety during the day. Jim looked worn out, haggard, and begrimed; but he was writing vigorously with the head of a keg between his knees for a desk, and by the light of an evil-smelling Mexican lamp-wick classically afloat in a broken saucer of oil. He started up when the other entered, and almost before they could exchange a greeting, began with a grave face: —

"Nat, you haven't heard, have you? No, of course you couldn't have heard — nobody would have told you, nobody knows but me — I was just going out to hunt you up. You knew about the prisoners — the ones they took at San Pablo — at the church?"

"San Pablo? The church?" said Nathan, startled by his manner; "at Cherubusco, do you mean? They always fortify the churches everywhere. Was that where the fighting was? I heard they took fifteen hundred —"

"No, no, I don't mean them — I don't mean the Mexican prisoners — I mean at the church — of course you don't know — we only took twenty-five or thirty of them, all Americans — the rest were all shot — didn't you know —"

"Oh, you mean those fellows they call the Brigade of Saint Patrick? Yes, I knew about that," Burke said, wondering

at the other's excitement; "well, what of it? What's the matter?"

Jim interrupted. "Nathan," he said, unconsciously lowering his voice, "George Ducey was among them! I saw him. They've got 'em all in irons. They say they'll all be hanged for deserting, every man!"

CHAPTER XI

The Brigade of Saint Patrick

It would be hard to describe what Burke felt and thought, whether surprise or horror, or a mere general rebellion of the senses at this piece of news. George a deserter was easy enough to figure — he was familiar with that conception — but George being hanged for it! The tragedy was out of all proportion — monstrous, incredible. The thing that in any other case would have seemed to Nat of all men's acts the most contemptible, as performed by George became natural and inevitable; the punishment he would have considered not one whit too stern took on an aspect of hideous injustice. Hang the deserters? Why, certainly — but not George. George was different; nobody that knew George would either blame him for running away — what could you expect? — or want to hang him for doing it. Hang that poor bundle of folly and feebleness? Surely the awful laws of war were not made for such as he. The futility of these objections was apparent to Burke even while they hurried through his mind; none the less, his whole being rose up in protest.

"I saw him. There can't be any doubt about it," said Jim, misreading the other's silence. "Are you surprised? Why, everybody thought he'd deserted — you thought he might have, yourself."

"I know — but what's he doing *here?*" Burke said in a kind of maze; "George wouldn't fight — why, George *couldn't* fight!" His voice rose almost irritably. "Anybody that *knows* George — it's impossible, I tell you. If there was any fight in him, why didn't he stay on his own side? How'd he get *here?* They can't hang him — it's — why, it's ridiculous!"

"A deserter's a deserter, you can't get around that," said

Sharpless; "as to fighting, he wasn't, I believe — but I don't know that that's got anything to do with it."

"He wasn't with them of his own free will — he couldn't have joined 'em voluntarily —" said Nathan, weakly.

"He must have run away of his own free will — you can't imagine anybody kidnapping him," Jim retorted — and neither one thought of smiling at this grotesque suggestion; the moment was too serious. "That'll all come out at the trial, anyhow. They won't turn the wretches off without a trial."

"How many of them are there?" asked Nathan, with aroused interest.

"I don't know — about thirty, I think. There were more than that to begin with, somebody told me, about a hundred. They were in two regular companies with uniforms and good arms — better than the Mexicans themselves — and they really did call them that — the Brigade of Saint Patrick, you know. Riley was in command of 'em — they called him Major Riley. I saw him. I saw 'em all, and they didn't look like such a hard lot, no worse than the rest of us, after marching and living so long in the open — roughing it the way we have. They were all of 'em killed but these few — shot in the San Pablo fight. I was talking to a fellow in the 3d, he said they fought like fiends — he said the Mexicans put up a white flag, and these fellows pulled it down three times."

"You didn't see any of that yourself, though?"

"No, no. I was just following along behind our men, and — and looking on, you know," said Jim. He went on talking a little brokenly, evidently trying to collect and arrange his memories. "When I left you this morning I thought I'd hunt up General Shields again. I understood he was moving over towards Cherubusco; it seems to be a sort of suburban-residence place like this, a handsome little town, you know, where the Mexican grandees go in summer time. Somebody told me it was between four and five miles straight east from Contreras. I started off in that general direction; after a while there began to be firing. I left the road, thinking I'd take a short cut across some maguey plantations, where I could see the artillery and horses had gone before, and then I got all mixed up, and the firing by

that time was pretty general, in every direction. I hadn't any idea who I'd run into next, Mexicans or our fellows, so I went on more cautiously, and presently struck the Coyacan road and then, praise the Lord, I knew where I was because I remembered it from yesterday!"

After this, it appeared, he had fallen in with a body of our troops on the way to reënforce Worth at San Antonio; and having been supplied with a gun and ammunition (he was totally unarmed!) at the instance of some officer whom he knew, joined them — or followed them, as he said — in the attack on that point, and on the bridge-head at the Rio Cherubusco where there was a very hot struggle lasting an hour or more.

"I think it was about two o'clock this afternoon when it began," he said. "We were in sight of the town, but not near enough to know what was going on there. Where we were the enemy gave away all at once — just like that — it seemed as if you could feel them breaking. All our men knew it, and began to run forward, hurrahing. It must have been about the same time, or only a few minutes later that San Pablo surrendered; we saw the white flag run up, and then, in a second or two, our own. The fighting went on some time longer on the other side of the town — the north side, that is, where Shields was, you know."

He made his way into the town, amongst many dreadful sights and sounds, and after some devious adventures reached the plaza, and found two companies of the 3d Infantry in possession of the church. They had already converted it into a hospital and prison; our troops were coming in on all sides; the battle was over; he could not tell how long it had taken, perhaps three hours. Our losses had been very heavy — nothing like the Mexicans, though! — but he couldn't get any reliable information; everybody was too exhausted or too excited. A private told him that Lieutenant Alexander was the first man over the fortifications, and pointed out the breach where they had entered. There was a high wall of adobe bricks surrounding the church where the enemy had planted their batteries, and on the flat roof, this man said, they posted their sharp-shooters who had been very active in picking off our men. "The fellow went on to say that they were all Americans and shot better than the Mexi-

cans — 'They knocked over every officer they could see,' he said, cursing; 'but we've got 'em now. They'll swing for it. Want to see 'em, mister?'

"I didn't know what he meant," Jim continued. "I knew they didn't hang prisoners of war, and thought the man must be a little bit cracked. But just then George Kendall — the *New Orleans Picayune* man, you know, he's been with Worth since the fighting commenced — came along asking where the Saint Patrick's Brigade prisoners were, and then I understood. The soldier said he'd show us. Kendall made some joke about looking for some missing friends of ours! They had them separated from the others in a room which was the sacristy, I believe. It was rather dark in there; they were standing up, lying down, sitting around on the benches, making themselves as comfortable as they could in their manacles, not at all restive under inspection, rather stolid. It was only a few hours after the fight — maybe they didn't realize their position yet; or maybe they knew it was all up and didn't care. You can't help wondering what a man like that thinks of himself, anyway — or if he thinks at all. They say, you know, that the Mexicans bribed them with promises of money and an officer's rank; everybody was to be a colonel or a general, I suppose. There's something sordid and pathetic and ridiculous in that, somehow. And here they all were, no better than they would have been in their own army — deserters with the rope around their necks, and the scorn of every honest man on both sides! —"

"Well, you saw George?" interrupted Burke, a little impatiently.

"Not right away — we didn't go in at first, you know. Then Kendall asked the corporal in charge if we could talk to the prisoners; the man said yes, he guessed so, if we wanted to, and looked at us a little curiously. I suppose he wondered how anybody could care to have anything to do with them except in the way of duty. Yet our men seem always to be very kind to the Mexican prisoners, I've noticed, crack jokes and share tobacco and so on; nobody came near these fellows, except one of the surgeons to bandage up some of them that were wounded. I felt a kind of diffidence about talking to them — I didn't know what to say — if it hadn't been for Kendall, I might not have gone in. But I followed

him. He went up to one and asked if he was Riley? The man said no, and pointed out Riley sitting in a corner talking to another that had his head between his hands. 'Are you Riley?' Kendall said to the first. He looked up, and answered civilly, 'Yes, sir.' And then there was a kind of silence, and even Kendall seemed stuck for something to say next. The other man raised his head, and, Nathan, it was George Ducey!

"He stared; I stared. I'm not certain now whether he knew me. I was just on the edge of shouting out his name, when I remembered his mother and the family and stopped myself. But I must have made some kind of noise, because Kendall turned around and said, 'What's that?' I said, 'Nothing, that man looks like somebody I know, that's all.' Riley said, 'Well, if you should happen to know anybody here, sir, I hope you'll remember we need all the friends we've got?' This he said in not at all a cringing way, however; he was quite straightforward and matter of fact. Then George spoke — not to me, nor to anybody in particular — 'I wish they'd take these things off my hands — they hurt me, oh, they hurt me!' and he began to cry. He was as dirty and unkempt as everybody else, and he cried — the tears ran down into his dirty half-grown beard — Lord! Riley tried to comfort him; he seems to be fond of George. The others were indifferent. I got out of the place as quick as I could — I couldn't stand it."

One might have fancied that the armistice was arranged solely for the purpose of affording time for the trial of this handful of sinners; for the proceedings covered nearly the whole of the two or three weeks during which we lay idle before Mexico City, and created a deal of stir in the camp — much more than the peace negotiations also going forward, which ultimately fell through, and which everybody believed would fall through, from the beginning. The case of the deserters touched the rank and file more nearly, and was of far more vital interest than any sort of cloudy diplomatic discussions; and the verdict when it was announced, ruthless as it must sound to civilian ears, probably made a very deep and salutary impression on the army at large.

The companions of Saint Patrick were tried by a general

court-martial presided over by Colonel Riley of the 2d Infantry, to which regiment a number of them had belonged; and two-thirds of the court concurring in every several case, they were all pronounced guilty and sentenced to hang by the neck until they were dead, dead, dead — an awful hearing for spectators as well as accused. The condemned men — with the single exception of George Ducey — were all from the regular army, and well known in their ancient regiments; and Captain Burke, a little to his surprise, found himself not alone in the various efforts he made during all this while to enlist the clemency of the court on George's behalf. There was not one of these wretches so abandoned but that one friend at least came and put in a good word for him! I do not say that this discovery moved Burke to any pity or sympathy for the traitors themselves; each one represented, doubtless, the worst, the most brutal and degraded elements of his class; yet even he must have some one good quality, some poor grace recognized and remembered kindly by his mates. Burke thought he saw in this a thing, small indeed, but withal touching, and creditable to humanity. In that gathering everybody certainly was in need of friends, as their leader had remarked; but Nathan had considerable difficulty in winning any one over to his own views about George. General Quitman received the story in silence with a sombre face, at length informing the captain coldly that he was exceedingly sorry to be of no assistance, but since he had never known Lieutenant Ducey, he could not possibly speak for him; that he was willing to believe the young man was of weak character, easily influenced, and led astray by bad company. "But," he added with that impressive formality which he always displayed towards any questions of military law, custom, or precedent whatever, "but you will perhaps allow me to say, Captain Burke, that these considerations do not seem to me sufficiently weighty to warrant a reversal or commutation of the sentence." Which was entirely true, or, at least, unanswerable. Admitting that George was a harmless fool, that was hardly a reason why he should not be punished for the crime he had knowingly committed; Burke's private and unshakable conviction was that such a punishment would be a sad miscarriage of justice — but how was he to make anybody else think so? He

wondered if ever any man before was put to such a job.

He went to see George. The deserters were removed to the convent of San Angel as soon as practicable, and decently lodged there during their trial. Some of our sick and wounded were accommodated in the cells and long, cool corridors whence almost all the monks had fled in dire panic on the American approach. It was a pretty spot, very green and flowery now during the rainy season, with a fountain in the patio in the midst of the cloisters, and some caged paroquets and other bright birds whom our convalescents tended zealously. From the roofs and balconies — the building standing high with a wide outlook — one might see the city twinkling in the distance, plains populated with tents, our flag breaking into ripples overhead; and at night and morning the familiar bugles declaimed cheerily from point to point. The world must look tragically pleasant to the prisoners these days, Burke thought, as he sought their quarters.

George was sick, it seemed; he was lying full-length on a bench, his eyes looking rather wildly out of his pallid face, and another man was fanning him with a sombrero which was all decorated with silver bullion cords and tassels, and with a handsomely embroidered letter "R" on either side of the crown in the Mexican fashion. The Samaritan thus employed — who had as villanous a face as ever I beheld — was in fact the notorious Riley, leader of the brigade, — Major, as he called himself, — and he got up and saluted when Burke came in with the turnkey.

"He's got a little fever, I think," he explained. And added with a sidelong glance, "Friend o' Ducey's, sir?"

George raised his head, and looked at his old captain, and recognized him with hardly a sign of surprise or any other emotion, for that matter. "Ah, Burke, how d'ye do?" he said in a ghastly voice, and sank back again. Nathan stammered out some kind of greeting, and sat down by him. Nobody offered to shake hands. The rest of the prisoners were dispersed about the room, no longer wearing shackles; a couple played cards, quite half a dozen were smoking. They looked at the visitor casually, knowing that he was not interested in any of them. Of this entire company Burke was the only honest man; and the only one who might expect to

live out the week: yet he was — to judge by appearances — infinitely the most ill at ease! I suppose there is a limit to every man's capacity for sensation, and, having reached it, he cannot be made any more frightened, or angrier, or sadder, or worked to any greater pitch of feeling whatever. Nothing else, it seemed to Burke, could account for a calm which would have been called heroic under any other circumstances.[1]

"This is a bad business, George," he said at last; and the other only giving a kind of groan, he went on, "I've been talking to some of the officers that were on the court, you know, but they — they don't seem to be able to do anything individually, so I'm going to see General Scott."

George sat up. "You tell him it's all a lie, Nathan," he said shrilly. "I never deserted — I wouldn't desert. I wasn't fighting — I never raised my hand — I never fired a shot — you can ask anybody here. I've — I've been a prisoner right along. They — they made me do it. I didn't want to go with 'em — I tried to get away from 'em — I — I —"

"All right, I'll tell him," said Burke, cutting short this incoherent harangue as gently as he could. "Only he'll want to know more, George. He'll want to know why you ran away in the first place — before Monterey, remember?"

"I *didn't* run away," George screamed out, trembling; "I never ran away, Burke. Whoever says I ran away is telling a lie. Who said I ran away? Everybody is always telling lies about me. I'm all alone — I haven't any friends — I *didn't* run away, I tell you!" His chin quivered; his face knotted up like a child's; the tears ran down. "Oh, won't somebody *please* listen to me? I *didn't* desert — I'm *not* a deserter! I just — I just —"

"He just kinder straggled off, didn't ye, George?" said Riley, interrupting (to Burke's amazement) in an anxious voice, and not at all satirically. "He just dropped outer the ranks, like men do, ye know," he went on addressing Burke; "and first thing he knew, he was lost and wandering

[1] I was told afterwards by eye-witnesses that the condemned men met their death in every case with the best possible composure and decency of bearing. — N. BURKE.

'round in the chap'ral miles from anywhere. That's where we found him — we come along and found him — ain't that the way it was, George? So we made him come along with us, just like he says —"

"And tell him I didn't fight — you *know* I didn't fight, tell him that!" George cried. He clutched at Riley's coat with a gesture of frenzied appeal. "Tell him I didn't fight — the men made me fight — I never raised my hand —"

"To be sure you didn't," said Riley, "you keep quiet, George, let me do the talking. He never fit a lick, sir. We just kept him along with us, to do the cooking and clean up the camp —"

"That's it — that's it — I cooked, and I washed their shirts, didn't I? Tell the general that was all I did — every single thing. You'll tell him that, won't you, Nat? Don't you think that'll make a — a difference? They wouldn't hang a man for that, would they? I didn't do *any*thing, I tell you. I — why, I was always wanting to go back to our army — wasn't I, Riley? — and they wouldn't *let* me —"

"Just you let *me* tell the cap.," Riley said soothingly. "*I'll* tell him. You're sick, you know. You'd better not talk any more." And it is the barest justice to say that Mr. Riley's tale which he thereupon delivered with many — but not *too* many — asseverations of its truth was admirably conceived, and rendered in a style calculated to gain credit and sympathy from any audience unacquainted with its hero or the narrator himself. It was an elaborated version of what he had already told Burke; George had never had any intention of deserting; he had not run away, he had got separated from the regiment in the confusion of the march, to his own great alarm and distress. It was after nightfall; he had wandered about helplessly, not daring to appeal to the natives for fear of being murdered, and suffering greatly from hunger and thirst, for the better part of the following two days. In these circumstances Riley's party had providentially — or not, as you choose to look at it — stumbled upon him; he had been a prisoner of theirs, practically, ever since, although consistently refusing to act against his countrymen — a part of the story which Burke could very well believe. In fact, the renegade chief, with a captivating ingenuousness, acknowledged that this recruit

was no soldier; adding that at the trial George's terror and bewilderment had been such that he was unable to give a coherent statement of these events.

I am sure that part of all this was true; but how much, or how distorted, or what George really did do, or in what way he fell in with the Brigade of Saint Patrick, nobody will ever know; afterwards, when left to himself, he either entered a general denial, or told half a dozen different and contradictory stories. I am not certain whether, even in the very act of deserting, he had any conception of the enormity of his offence; a man who is honest to nobody cannot, in nature, be honest with himself, and the Lord who made him alone knows under what guise George's actions appeared before his own eyes. At the time it would have been manifestly disastrous to let him do his own lying; but I have not yet ceased to wonder at Riley's benevolent intervention. What sentiment was it of affection or pity, strangely enough lodged in that ruffianly breast that moved Riley to plead for him? The fellow, blackguard as he was, undoubtedly possessed both force and intelligence — of a certain order; and I can only suppose his fondness for George — who requited it with a perfect indifference and ingratitude — to have been one of those unaccountable fancies we sometimes see of the strong for the weak.

It now became Burke's duty to carry the history to General Scott; and if any one imagines that this errand was agreeable to the captain, let him disabuse himself of that idea. The commander-in-chief received him in his usual stately manner, and heard him through with patience.

"Are you aware, Captain Burke," he said at the end, "that I have here —" and he tapped a great heap of papers lying before him on the table — "I have here an application of the same nature from every one of these men? I have looked into every case with the utmost minuteness, for —" said the general, sonorously, "clemency and humanity, paradoxical as it may seem, I hold to be the first of a soldier's duties. I have commuted no less than eight of the sentences, wherever there was the least excuse for it. Now *you* come with *your* plea. As I understand it, this young man says he strayed away somehow or other, and was picked up somehow or other by Riley's brigade, who thereafter kept him,

somehow or other, and more or less against his will. Without meaning to doubt *you* at all, Captain, that seems to me a very fishy story. For one thing, men of that caliber don't burden themselves with a useless prisoner, in general. They either shoot him down or let him go. And on the other hand, he doesn't appear to have made a real effort to escape, as almost any man would in such a position. How was that?"

"He would be incapable of it, I think," said Burke; "he's not strong physically or — or mentally. He couldn't invent any plan of escape, and force was out of the question."

"You mean to say he isn't entirely responsible?"

"No, not that exactly. But — but he's only a boy, in fact."

"Only a boy?" echoed the chief, and glanced through his papers; "according to this he's twenty-five years old. Is that a mistake?"

"No, that's correct. But he's not very mature in some respects."

"When I was twenty-five, I was a *man*, Captain Burke," said General Scott, impressively; "and a man, I may add without vanity, who had already been of some service to his country."

"General," said Burke, "you were Winfield Scott." A remark which, I think, was by no means ill-placed.

If you will turn to the records of the time, you will find that, for one reason or another, nine of the deserters were released from the death penalty, among them being our friend Riley, who, it appeared, had deserted before the beginning of the war, and although he most richly deserved it, could not, according to Scott's ruling, legally be held. Instead, he was sentenced, like some of the others, I believe, to be whipped, and branded in the hand, following the savage military code of our day. George Ducey escaped these punishments, and Captain Burke moved him at once to other quarters at San Augustin where he remained in safety and quiet until the fall of the city. The rest duly paid their score; and I am told that the tree — at a cross-roads somewhere between San Angel and the town of Tacubaya — where the Irish brigade were hanged is still shown to tourists in Mexico.

CHAPTER XII

The Street of the Good Death

Hostilities being resumed at the end of a fortnight or so — during which the enemy repeatedly and shamelessly violated the terms of the armistice and their own most solemn engagements — the city of Mexico at length surrendered after two days of determined fighting on both sides, September 13, 1847 — an event which virtually closed this war. In the final hot and bloody actions Quitman's division bore a handsome part, the general conducting himself personally with the most splendid gallantry, charging the batteries before and at the Belem Gate at the head of his men, and carrying them under a murderous fire; and successfully holding this advanced and perilous position actually within the city until the surrender several hours later. It is true that Burke's general was afterwards mildly reprimanded by the commander-in-chief for attacking this point at all, having been directed to move against the other gate (the San Cosme) which, being commanded by the fortress,[1] had been left by the enemy practically undefended, and might have been taken with far less risk and loss. General Scott, however, let it be plainly seen that in his heart of hearts he did not in the least blame his subordinate; who could expect a man like Quitman to remember instructions in a moment of victorious excitement? Certainly his aide had no business to make comments, for that staid and strong-minded young person forgot all about the instructions, too!

The war was over; the Mexican generals fled; the Mexican army scattered to the four winds; the Mexican government — I was going to say fell into chaos, but as a matter of fact it could scarcely become any more chaotic than it had already been for years. And owing in part to this deplorable condition, the peace negotiations conducted by Mr. Trist, a sort

[1] Chapultepec.

of unofficial envoy of President Polk's, by General Scott, by pretty nearly anybody and everybody who chose to take a hand, were prolonged and intricate to a degree. While they went on — nothing was settled until the following spring — the United States Army lived at pleasant quarters in and about the city, our division occupying a big Dominican Convent, and the buildings of the Military College on a street called the Estampa Jesus, leading to one of the gates. General Quitman, having been made military governor (an appointment suitable to his rank, and one which gave him, I believe, great gratification), was housed with his official family in the *Palacio Nacional*, this being the first and only time in his life when Burke enjoyed a residence of so magnificent a title. Our officers, indeed, soon discovered that its magnificence was a matter solely of the title and nothing else; the National Palace lacked the comforts one would have found in the simplest of our homes. It was a draughty old stone barn, scantily supplied with tawdry old cotton velvet upholsterings and hangings, with a huge melancholy dirty courtyard in the middle of it, vast yawning doors and windows through which the chill winds roamed unhindered, Brobdingnagian ceilings and Lilliputian stoves. To make up for these drawbacks, our palace looked upon the open square of the Zocalo, very brilliant and lively in the mornings, with a pretty market where they sold flowers and birds, across the way, and backed by the pinkish plaster façade of the cathedral; and by and by the Mexican young ladies began to come shyly forth and show their dark eyes and high-colored costumes in the plaza, and took very kindly to the music of our regimental bands playing of an evening. On the whole, they supported the presence of the invader with tolerable fortitude, and the spectacle of these petticoats was infinitely refreshing to the invader himself. Lord, how wearied out we all were with the camp, with the sight of our own bearded, weather-beaten faces, with our worn, stained, dusty uniforms, with the eternal movement of our life! If there had been a prospect of further fighting, I believe there was not a man of us but would have gone at it, with as fresh a zeal as in the beginning; but now, with nothing but peace on the horizon, what we longed for above all else in the world was home. Captain Burke visited the hospital to see a soldier of the

2d Pennsylvanias, who had been severely wounded in the leg at the advance of our storming parties, and informed him that he would certainly get the silver medal "for bravery on the field of battle." "Yes, sir?" says Private Donaldson (I think that was his name). "Yes, sir?" says the poor fellow, listlessly. "I'm gittin' almighty tired o' these Mexican vittles, ain't you, sir? I wisht I could have one o' maw's doughnuts!"

Being settled in the city, Burke was now obliged to "turn from the sword to the pen" (which I quote from General Quitman), and among the letters, orders, proclamations, and so on which his general poured forth in abundance, the secretary took time to write to Mrs. Ducey, acquainting her with the finding of her son, which he did briefly and as gently as was possible, merely reciting the central fact, and leaving George to supply the details. He had been found and would go home as soon as he was fit to travel, wrote Burke, fervently hoping that nobody would inquire into the manner of the finding; what the young man himself told his family, Nat never knew. George had to be coaxed, argued, ordered to write, as if he had been a child; he was really not well in some obscure way; he would shrink and tremble pitifully at a sudden noise; he was thin and weak, and his face had fallen into uncanny lines of age. "Let him alone — he'll be all right," the doctor answered rather unsympathetically to Burke's questions. "He's nothing but a bundle of nerves — like a woman; he hasn't got over his scare yet, but he will in a little. Sleeps sound and eats like a ploughboy; he doesn't need any medicine. Let him alone." But if letting alone could have cured him, George would have recovered then and there; for excepting Burke himself and Jim Sharpless — who, although he disliked George as much as he could dislike anybody, had nevertheless too kind a heart and too much feeling for old days and associations to cast him off — no one ever came near the young man or so much as asked after him. It had been only a year, and there were many officers yet with us who could remember him; but none of them ever saw George as he passed along the streets, none of them acknowledged his salutes, he might have been wrapped in clouds such as we are told encompassed the Olympians, only, alas, there was nothing noble about poor George's

isolation. The position would have been intolerable to most men; for most of us, even if we have no moral sense, at least set a value on our neighbor's opinion. What he thinks of us may be of no importance to the strong, but it is a staff and bulwark to the weak. Burke used to wonder how George stood it; why didn't he try to get away, to go home or anywhere and begin over? Apparently the idea never entered his head; he made himself exceedingly comfortable in the quarters Burke hired for him, took a great interest in getting his new clothes, linen, and shoes, and, being ignored by his own class, began before long to make friends in other and what we call lower circles, to whom he was very fluent on the subject of his wrongs and sufferings.

Whether these gentry — amongst whom there were numbers of those dubious, needy, scheming broken-down people of every calling under the sun who followed the army about — whether they believed George, or what they thought of him, did not much matter; at any rate, he did not lack a certain society, and perhaps a fellow-feeling created a bond between them and him. Burke used to meet them hovering about George's lodgings, eating and drinking with him at his boarding-house table, seedy-looking little men with furtive eyes, red-faced bouncing big men in frayed satin neckties, glaring waistcoasts, and dirty linen, invariably titled "Judge" or "Doctor"; who they were the captain never had a chance to find out, for none of them displayed the slightest relish for his company; they vanished incontinently at the most remote glimpse of his grim, silent presence, and George himself was not a person from whom one would expect very accurate information about anybody. According to him they were all the salt of the earth, "great, big-hearted fellows," inexplicably fallen upon evil days like himself, and Burke thought it not worth while to inquire further. He discovered, however, that there was one exception in this congress of persecuted nobility, namely, Thomas Riley, late Saint Patrick's Brigade, whose darkling countenance the captain recognized one day in the neighborhood of the Calle de Buena Muerte where George was established.

"Was that fellow around here? What did he want?" he asked afterwards of George whom he found in a great state of virtuous indignation.

"Why, he came here to see me — actually had the impudence to come here and ask for me just as if he was on an equality! Said he was glad I *got off*, and liked to see me in so much better health. Can you beat that for cheek? I ordered him out of here pretty quick, I tell you!"

"Did he want money?" asked Nathan, doubting that Mr. Riley was a person whom George could easily order away; but the latter shook his head.

"Oh, no, he's got lots of money — plunder, you know. Why, that man must have hundreds — thousands of dollars! He wouldn't divide — catch him! No, he just came to see me, the low blackguard!"

Burke was silent a moment. "Do you know Riley seemed to me to be rather attached to you, George?" he said at last.

George smirked feebly. "Well, you know, Burke, I was the only *gentleman* he'd ever had anything to do with, and I guess my manners, my — my *style*, you know, kind of impressed him. Hang it all, blood *will* tell!"

Whether owing to his reception or not, this was the last of Riley; I never saw nor heard of him again, so that he may be living somewhere in a respected old age, or have long since gone to the dark end he very likely deserved— who knows? George stayed on contentedly enough; even the arrival of home letters full, I dare say, of fond, incoherent thanksgivings, rhapsodies, queries, and entreaties, left him unmoved. Burke saw him yawning over the pages closely written in Mrs. Ducey's neat, flowing hand; he did not read them through, and let most of them go unanswered for days and weeks. "What would you have?" said Sharpless, with a shrug, when Nat commented on this indifference. "If I were in George's place, I'd be pretty hard put to it, too, I believe, for the proper, plausible thing to write. The job of explaining himself must be a little beyond George's abilities."

"He doesn't have to explain. Anything he did would be right in his mother's eyes," Burke said. "That's the beautiful thing about mothers."

"I suppose so. And by the way, Nat, who's putting up for all this? For George's board and clothes, I mean, if it's a fair question?"

"Why, I am. It's all right. I wrote and explained to Mr. Ducey — no need to settle until we get back home."

"Huh!" said Jim, thoughtfully, "do you keep him in pocket-money, too?"

"Well, he's got to have a little something to spend, you know," said Burke, argumentatively, conscious of something critical in the other's attitude. But Jim only ejaculated "Huh!" a second time, and the subject was not again referred to between them.

This sounds like a piece of magnificent generosity on Captain Nat's part, but, to be frank, it was no such thing, the provision he made for George being of the most frugal nature, and the accommodations, unlike his own, not at all palatial, as the young gentleman speedily let him know. During the whole time we were in Mexico City — some eight or ten weeks — George lodged in a house itself respectable enough, if poor and plain, but situated some distance towards the southeastern part of town, in an old and more or less disreputable quarter. It was convenient to Burke's eye, and not far from our barracks, two good reasons for the selection; although I fear the addition of a large body of volunteer soldiery, newly paid, just off a hard campaign, and quartered in a big city for the first time in months, did not exactly raise the tone of the neighborhood. As usual, all the old, regular, native gambling, drinking, and other dives were running full head-on, and reënforced by a hundred new ones; and the Street of the Good Death, which, Jim Sharpless suggested, might much more appropriately have been named the Street of the Bad Life, had its share of all these iniquities. It was a short street debouching on a little plaza where there were a church and a gloomy huddle of pawn-shops and *pulquerias*, and blank plastered stone houses with archways through which one caught a glimpse of ascending stairs, and patios dark with dreadful promise — not a place, in short, where one would choose to take a promenade after dark; yet Captain Burke had formed a habit of cutting across here to reach home at the close of a day's riding about the outskirts of the city, and being armed and mounted, never came to any harm thereby. It made it easy for him to stop and have a word with George once or twice in the week, a kind of duty about which I believe he was rather punctilious.

He was riding thus one evening, when, entering the square

and passing, as usual, along its upper side, the captain all at once became aware that he was being followed and watched. In those narrow, ill-lighted streets he had to rein his horse to a walk, not being desirous of plunging headlong into some native family keeping house in the gutter with their pots and brazier according to their custom, or of stamping the life out of any Mexican dog, pig, or baby who might be sprawling about the road; so that the spy easily kept pace. In fact, his manœuvres were so open that he struck Burke as a remarkably frank or careless sort of bravo; but we had received more than one concrete and bloody warning against treacherous attacks, and the captain made a mental note of this fellow's appearance. He was an ordinary peon in the rusty sombrero, the red-and-black blanket draped about his shoulders, the skin-tight soiled white cotton pantaloons, the rope sandals they all wore; and when Burke unexpectedly caught his eye, he first stood stock-still in hesitancy or confusion, then turned and darted up a neighboring alley! "Come, this is a new variety of melodrama," Nat thought, grinning to himself, and went on slowly, looking for the gentleman to pop up again at some conveniently dark corner. Nothing of the sort happened, however; and the captain would certainly never have given the incident another thought, but, two or three days later, sitting at his desk in the office at the palace, there was shown in to him in broad daylight, and with no mystery whatever, the very same native! The people came constantly to us with complaints or petitions, and, judging from the nature of some of these, I doubt if the city of Mexico had ever received so just and stable a government as during its occupation by the United States Army; but Burke imagined this case to be something out of the ordinary.

"*Ya he le visto,*" said he, briskly, not proposing to allow any beating about the bush; "*está el hombre que me era siguiendo la noche. Porque? Que quiere?*"

The man, who had a rather dull but not at all vicious face, answered humbly. Yes, he had been following the Señor Coronel, but he meant no harm, he would swear by the Virgin of Guadalupe, he meant no harm. He was an honest man. He wanted to look at the Señor Coronel.

"To look at me?" repeated Burke, incredulously.

Pero, si! He had been told to find a señor capitan Burke — but that must have been a mistake, for it was coronel and not capitan at all — who was a tall man with blue eyes. And they called him — as one might say, señor — *el Peleador* — that is, as one might say, *el gran guerrero* — he did not know the English word —

"'Fighting Burke' — I know," said Nat, with impatience, "well?"

Yes, that was it. He had been looking a long while; he was a hard-working man, he worked all day, and so he had to hunt for the señor in the evenings, when he went to and from the shop, because he had no other time. He was a tailor and worked in the Sastreria del Espiritu Santo, in the street of that name. You could ask the patrón about him — ask whether Pablo Suinaga was not an honest man.

"All right," said Nat, "go ahead with it. What do you want of me?"

"Señor," said Pablo Suinaga, respectfully, "the slow carrier never spills the water. First of all I was to make sure that you were the right man — and that has been a little hard, seeing that I cannot speak English, but I have it written down —" saying which he produced a dirty bit of paper with "Captain Nathan Burke" scrawled upon it, and spread it under the other's eyes; he seemed to regard it as a kind of talisman, for he drew back when Burke put out a hand, plainly averse to his touching it. "*Està usted, verdad, señor?*" he asked earnestly.

"That is my name," said Burke, profoundly puzzled, "all you had to do was to show it to somebody."

"*Señor, con permiso,* there is another Capitan Burke, and I found him first, only he was dead!" This was true, that officer having been killed, I think, at Molino del Rey; and Pablo recited the tale of his search and disappointment, and consequent loss of time with great feeling, notwithstanding the fact that it had nothing to do with the matter in hand. But Burke had to resign himself; it always took any one of them an inordinate time, with countless repetitions and embellishments, to get to the core of his affair, whatever that might be. Suinaga said that he lived in the Calle Higuera — "you know that street, señor, two or three times you have ridden through it on your horse, it runs the same as

Buena Muerte, only farther east. I have a wife and three children, and we are honest people, Señor Coronel, but the others in the house —" he spread his hands and indulged in an almost too expressive pantomime, "they are not honest, *por Dios*, no! All like *that*, the women worse than the men. I have told my wife not to have anything to do with them, but women! Telling is no good, you have to take a stick to them. *Vaya, señor*, you know how that is, without doubt! One day, six — eight months ago my wife told me, 'Pablo, there is a new young woman on the top floor.' I said, 'Well, and if there is? *Talvez es una ramera como las demas.* Let her alone.' She said, 'But this one is white, and I think she is Americanita.' Says I, 'That doesn't keep her from being a —— as I said. *Calla, mujer!* I don't want to hear any more about her!' That was the end of it for a while; but in two or three weeks she began again, 'Pablo, that girl is sick. She coughs, coughs all the time, *pobrecita!*' Said I: 'Sick, is she? She would be better dead, and burning in hell for her sins. I tell you, let her alone.' '*Hombre de Dios!*' says she, 'is that a Christian way to talk?' And after that, señor, do what I would and say what I would, my wife went to see her and cooked food and took it to her, and nursed her like her own sister — *lo que son las mujeres!*"

"Well?" said Burke, patiently.

"Well, señor, she began to be very much sicker after a while, in spite of everything my wife did. She had fever, and she coughed blood, and the clothes would be wet on her as she lay in the bed — wet like rain. That was in the summer and she has got worse since; she cannot live. Everybody in the house and in the whole street has been kind; we have all gone and told her she was going to die, and offered to get Padre Felipe, so that she can die with the Sacrament, but she won't hear of it. I myself have told her over and over again, but she only says she would get well if she could go back to where she comes from; and that when the army came, she would go back to your country, señor, for she is Americanita, as my wife thought. She has always seemed to be quite sure your army would come — and that is another sign she cannot live. They who are about to die see things — *quien sabe? Mirè, señor:* when the fighting began, she heard the cannon before anybody else, and said, 'They are coming!'

Then after your soldiers came into the city, she asked me to look for you, and she gave me that paper —"

"What's her name?" Burke interrupted him suddenly.

The man didn't know; he had never heard her called anything more than "Niña" or "Señorita," the common form of addressing women in that country, where a surname is the last thing one needs. She had black eyes and hair, he said — ah! The Señor Coronel knew her?

"I think so," said Burke.

Pablo Suinaga said he was very glad, and plainly meant it. He had had a long hunt. It was some time before he found out for a certainty that the other Burke was not the right man, although the sick woman steadfastly refused to believe it; and it was she herself, finally who, sitting propped up by a window — "she could not get her breath otherwise" — had caught sight of Burke as he rode past, and had screamed out that that was the man. "*Pues, señor*, even after I followed you, and found out your name by questioning at that house where you stopped, — after all that, she wasn't certain whether she wanted to see you, and was in twenty minds about it from one hour to the next — *lo que son las mujeres!*"

"She wants to see me now, though?" said Burke.

"Oh, yes, she says you will take her back to your country — and she cannot last another week!"

Burke went that night under Suinaga's guidance to the house in the Calle Higuera, which was the sort of place to be expected, running over with men, women, and children, full of discordant outcry, foul sights, foul sounds, foul smells, an Inferno of dirt and vice. The stage was set most suitably for the closing act of the wretched drama, nor could any one have asked (I suppose) a sharper moral lesson than that conveyed by Nance Darnell's end; it would have satisfied even Mrs. Ducey, or any other good and pure woman. Two or three of the women and a tribe of children, seeing the blue uniform and shoulder-straps in Suinaga's company, joined and trailed after us along the grimy stairs and corridors, curious and voluble in their high chittering Mexican voices. Nat heard the youngsters quarrelling and insisting and asking questions. "Is she dead? You said I could see her when she was dead — yes, you did, you did! *Oigá!* Antonio!

She's dead, and I'm going to see her. Come along!" "You lie — she is not dead. Manuel has seen her, Manuel Garfias. She lies on the bed with her eyes rolled up, and her mouth open, but she's not dead. They have no candles at her head and feet — she's not dead yet, is she, Manuelito?" "*Tonto!* They would not have candles for her — she is a heretic — all the Llankies are heretics, tio Juan told me so." "She's dead, I tell you!" "She's not — she goes this way in her throat — Grr-ugh! Grr-ugh — agh!" "Who is the señor in the blue coat? Ask him for a centavo — all the Americanos are rich — their houses are made of gold." "Señor, I am very poor, and sick and starving. For the love of God give me a little something!" "To me, too, señor. My mother is sick and my father is sick, and we have nothing to eat — !" They clung about his knees, whining. "I will pay you all to go away," he said, sick at heart; "and every one that stays away shall have double when I go, but if he comes back in the meanwhile, *nada!*" The bargain was soon struck, while the women looked on and laughed.

"You be off, too, all of you!" said the tailor, turning at the threshold of one of the squalid dens they called rooms; he seemed to have some misty idea of the decencies of the moment, and was, perhaps, a man to be obeyed. "The señor wants to see her by herself. Santa Maria, must I speak twice, then? *Salgan, ustedes, todas!*"

They scattered screeching and some of them giggling. Burke went into the room and went up to the pallet-bed which was huddled by the window — the sashless and unglazed hole in the wall that served that purpose, that is. There was a light burning and smoking near by; Nance lay in the attitude he had heard one of the boys describe, asleep or at least unconscious. She was so changed, he would hardly have known her. He stood looking down at her. We hear a great deal from poetry and romance about the awful beauty and majesty of death; yet believe me, it is only in books that the article and act of dying is any way majestic or aught but pitiful. This body gives up its hold with such dishonorable struggles, with such slow and painful disfigurement, as the senses shrink to witness; and if we would be plain with ourselves, we must acknowledge that not all our creeds, nor the belief in heaven

and immortality and choiring angels can gild the physical hideousness of our end. So ghastly was Nance's aspect that the young man thought for an instant the end had really come; but she roused at his exclamation, and opened her eyes, which looked very large and brilliant, and fixed them on him.

"Nance, do you know me?" he asked, for, in spite of the brightness of her look, there was something singularly blank and distant in it.

She made a fluttering movement with her right hand which Burke recognized as an effort to put it out; and said in a voice which to his surprise sounded quite strong and natural: "Of course I know ye, Nat. I reckoned you'd come. Won't ye set? Set down here by th' bed."

Burke obeyed dumbly, and took her clammy cold hand in his; he was a good deal moved, but Nance herself not at all, apparently; she lay and looked at him without emotion in that calm of defeat which death seems to allow alike to saints and sinners, accompanying the most ominous features of illness with a merciful blunting of the understanding. "Lord, let me know mine end, and of my days the number—" but did any man ever make that prayer in earnest, or realize that dissolution was upon him? That Nance did not was made clear almost by the first words she uttered.

"I been right poorly, Nathan, but I'm feeling a little mite better this last week. I guess I'll be up pretty soon now. I look kinder peakèd, don't I?"

"Yes, you — you show you've been sick," Burke said.

"I didn't 'low I'd ever bother you agin, Nat, but then I wasn't lookin' out for bein' sick, y' know. Person feels diff'rent 'bout a thing like that when they're sick, somehow. Seemed, as long as th' army was right here, 'n' you was here, 'twouldn't do no harm for to let you know, anyways. Tell ye, Nathan, I was pretty nigh crazy to see a white man, let alone *you*. Th' people 'a' been reel kind, but shucks! they're Mexicans — *you* know what they are. They mean well, but for a while here they had me plumb scairt, talkin' 'bout dyin'. That was before I begun to git better, y' know. I jest c'ldn't stand it — I had to send for you."

She could get through this explanation only by pausing many times with painful gasps and chokings, her voice lessen-

ing to a mere thread of a whisper at the end; Burke began some words meant to assure her that he wanted nothing so much as to help her whenever he could, but she went on without, apparently, hearing him: "They even come in 'n' told me you was dead — stood me down you was dead, when I jest knew you wasn't! That shows how much they know — pore critters!"

"Haven't you had any doctor?"

"Oh, law, yes. A doctor 'n' a priest, too. They're jest th' same as th' rest, they ain't got any sense, any of 'em. 'F I could git out o' here, I'd git well a heap quicker. Why, I don't feel a bit bad. It's only I'm so tired."

"Well, I'm going to get you out of here, quick as I can, Nance," said Burke, cheerfully. "It's a good thing you sent for me — best thing you could have done."

"Yes, I 'lowed you'd take me away. It'll cost somethin' of course, but Pap'll pay ye. People most injinerally don't b'leeve it, but Pap's mighty pertickler 'bout owin' anybody money — you know how Pap is," she said with no change of expression, and in a manner so reasonable as to render her words all the more startling. But the next moment she seemed to come to herself. "Was I talkin' 'bout Pap, Nathan? Ain't that funny? I git to thinkin' 'bout him, 'n' first you know, I fergit he's dead."

Whether it was the change, the fresh air and greater comforts Burke was able to give her, or whether these extremes of weakness and revival are familiar features of her disease — our doctors themselves seemed to be of divided opinion — Nance did actually improve a little during the next few weeks. There never was the slightest hope for her; but even this brief reprieve and respite was grateful, and the poor thing herself talked on of getting well and going home with a heart-rending confidence. Would any one, would Burke, her only friend, have had her recover? I do not know. In her moments of suffering, the young man found himself with horror pausing on the thought, Lord God Almighty, let her live or let her die, but one way or the other, let the torment be ended, for flesh and blood cannot longer endure this spectacle! And I will say this, that no man or woman has ever seen a like hopeless decline even of the one

nearest and dearest without, consciously or not, the same prayer.

Burke used to visit her every day or so, thereby providing additional color and body, I dare say, to those reports which George Ducey had been so forward to circulate. If Nance ever thought of that passage in her career, she did not mention it; she never spoke about her recent life at all, except the months of her illness; it all seemed to have slipped away from her like a foul garment. What would *going home* have meant to her, in health? Yet she dwelt on it, or at least used that form of words constantly, without, however, asking after anybody, or naming any place. She was very much like other invalids, talking to Nat when he sat with her about her appetite, the food, the doctor, the nurse, her improvement since yesterday — what would you have? It is only in works of fiction, as I have said, that the death-bed is poetical or dramatic; and I think now that poor Nance's last days were not less sad for being so commonplace. Her mind was at no time absolutely clear, being liable to lapses such as we have seen; but towards the end she wandered a great deal more, calling out and naming people who were strange to Burke, often with a distressing earnestness, and talking to herself with feeble gestures. She died in November, the week before we started for home.

CHAPTER XIII

Arms yield to the Toga

And now Johnny was to go marching home, with his honors and his scars, with his limp and his hanging sleeve, with the goggle-eyed stone idol he dug up with his bayonet out of the crumbling side of Cholula Pyramid, with the Mexican cavalry officer's sash and sabre, and the silver crucifix he bought in Thieves' Market down by the Zocalo of a Sunday morning. "Think they'll look kinder pretty fixed up over th' chimbly-piece — sort of a mee-mento," says Johnny sentimentally, not yet aware, honest lad, that a cruel stab of pain whenever it threatens rain will supply him with a much more forcible mee-mento for the rest of his life. He thinks — with what longing! — of the cabin and the corn-patch, the cross-roads schoolhouse, the swimming-hole — "It's a terrible pity 'bout Lem Stiles! Never think of goin' in swimmin' 'thout jest nachally lookin' fer Lem to be there. An' my lordy, th' times we've snaked melons out'n old Pete Baker's patch! Lem he got shot, y' know, back to Cerro Gordo, last spring — terrible pity!" he sighs retrospectively to some other Johnny who, calling up his own home-picture of prairie-land, mountains, sea-beaten coast, or palmetto-swamp, and some Lem Stiles of his acquaintance, nods in sympathy. Yes, it's a pity, but war is war; it is all over now; and we have done our duty, no matter if the generals do wrangle and contradict, and the newspapers find fault; we have played, if not a hero's part, at least a man's. Let us go home and kiss Jennie and the babies, who won't be caring a penny whether we are heroes or not, so we are safe and whole!

There was, however, one man who, all signs to the contrary notwithstanding, was firmly convinced that the conflict was not yet ended, that it would only end when our government should have acquired undisputed sway throughout the Republic of Mexico, and seen the wisdom of incor-

porating that territory with the United States. Burke's general used to go over these theses by the hour with much coruscating and explosive rhetoric, and a terrific amount of letter-writing; and, in order to further these mighty events, the first step, it appeared, was to apply to the general-in-chief for the command of a full division, "in consonance with my rank as major-general," said Quitman, formally pointing out that he had waived this right at Puebla "when the exigencies of the public service were imperative." General Scott replied simply that he didn't consider himself able to make any such arrangement; whereupon it became necessary for Burke's general to apply in person to the secretary of war at Washington. "And while there, Burke, I shall not fail to call Mr. Marcy's attention — if I go *no higher* than him —" Quitman informed his aide impressively — "to the inaccuracy of the reports describing the taking of Mexico City, and my division's part in the actions. It's no secret — everybody in this division, everybody in the whole army, knows it — we have *not* received our due. There ought not to be any doubt in the public mind — the American public, every man, woman, and child in the United States, should *know* that we were foremost in the attack on the fortress, and first at the city gates. It's only our just due. Great God, is a man like *you* to be passed over with a mere word, 'Captain — now Colonel — Burke displayed great coolness and daring!' Is *that* all they've got to say? They could say that much for every single man, every last private among my gallant fellows. No, they haven't done us justice. And as to *my* recklessness — as to my needlessly sacrificing my men at the Belen Garita — it's a monstrous falsehood. The lives of my men are as dear to me as my own. I never received one order from General Scott to advance by the other road — never! At least, none that I can remember. He never sent me any word about it — nothing that I could possibly regard as authoritative, anyhow. It's accusing me of insubordination — *I* insubordinate and reckless! They little know John Quitman. No, we've been misrepresented, Burke, perhaps not intentionally so, but still misrepresented. At best, newspaper reports are seldom strictly true — I'm not reflecting on your friend Mr. Sharpless, of course," added the general hastily, afraid that

he had hurt the other's feelings; "he is one of a few who are at once brilliant and absolutely reliable. A talented man, sir, and what is more a man of *heart*, — a man for whom I have the greatest respect."

General Quitman with upwards of fifty officers from his division, most of whom like Burke and unlike the general himself were definitely resigning their commissions, left the city of Mexico about the middle of November, receiving such magnificent formalities of farewell as delighted the general's soul and abjectly dismayed his late secretary, who was no hand at all at speech-making, and never knew which way to look while the compliments were passing. The municipal authorities called in a body to manifest their respect and good-will; the commander-in-chief dined us elaborately. Colonel Burnett of the New York regiment addressed to the general a farewell oration that brought tears to Quitman's eyes; the feelings he expressed — said the colonel — were those of the entire division towards one who was to them at once general, father, and friend —"your fame was known to us before our association as officers, and its lustre has brightened as the sun from morn to noon. . . . We have seen you at Chapultepec as cool as when we meet you now in friendship. . . . Not a muscle moved in that stern and manly face but to smile when the colors of your division and our beloved country were thrown to the free winds above the conquered castle!" recited Colonel Burnett amid prodigious applause. Indeed, what he said was true, and there was not one of us but felt a great love and admiration for our commander, so brave, so boyish, so high-souled. He replied with a great deal of feeling and spirit, referring regretfully to the fact that he was now about to separate from those gallant officers and men with whom he had been so honorably associated — "but I regard it as the soldier's part to seek the path where duty calls me!" says our general in a thrilled and trembling voice, honestly convinced that duty called him to go and bedevil the authorities into giving him a commission in the regular army! We cheered him to the echo; and then somebody got up — it was Captain Hutton, also of the New York volunteers — and "presented Colonel Nathan Burke with an elegant pair of silver spurs, accompanying the gift with a brief but extremely apropos

speech. Colonel Burke made an appropriate reply!" Heavens and earth, I can see Jimmie now, scrawling the above note for his newspaper, grinning and underscoring "*brief but extremely apropos!*" The fact is, both gentlemen were embarrassed almost to the point of speechlessness, and nothing but the kind applause of the rest relieved the situation.

We reached New Orleans a day or so before Thanksgiving, where we got, literally, a roaring reception, salvos of cannon going off in the Place d'Armes and Lafayette Square fit to deafen the populace; more oratory — more enthusiasm — crowds of bewilderingly pretty women — the American Theatre jammed to the roof that night, and everybody standing up when our general entered to "See, the conquering hero comes!" on a very vigorous brass band. All of which we were once more regretfully obliged to part from, as we took boat up the river next day, amid tremendous hurrahing from the mob assembled on the levees. Who wouldn't be Johnny when he comes marching home? There were a number of civilians trailing humbly in our company, among them Mr. James Sharpless, and our friend, the ex-lieutenant of Ohio volunteers, George Ducey, Esquire, — a bracketing together of their names which would have pleased neither one. "What do you want to carry *him* around on cotton for, Nat?" growled the former; "damn it, let him herd along with the discharged men on one of the transports — it would be enough too good for the fellow. What are you going to do with him? You can't have him around — nobody'll speak to him. If he had the spirit of a louse he'd keep out of it himself. You take as much care of him as if he were actually worth something —"

"He is, to his mother," said Burke.

"Why, of course, but let his mother look out for him, then. You're not responsible for George Ducey — it's quixotic. He's stolen from you and lied about you, and he'll keep on stealing from you and lying about you. Does that fellow know what gratitude or justice or humanity means? He's never done a thing in his life that won't be remembered to his everlasting discredit. When you get home, you're going to find out what you have to thank George for," cried out Jim, excitedly.

"What difference does all that make?" asked the other. "I know as well as you what George is. Do you suppose I'm looking after him because I'm in hopes he'll turn over a new leaf — reform and become a worthy member of society? He'd never do that in a thousand years. I'm not doing it for George's sake — I'm doing it for my own. Would you have had me let him hang? Or, after we got him off from that, should I have let him starve?"

"You might let him *work* now, anyhow," said Sharpless with a half-laugh; "that would be at least a novelty." Yet he perhaps felt himself answered, and offered no more objections. He looked at his friend affectionately, whimsically. "Oh, go your way, Nat Burke. To the end of your days you will be shouldering somebody's burdens, and somebody will be imposing on you." So this fiery discussion concluded, the two friends smoking in perfect amity with their heels cocked up on the guards of the Mississippi steamboat.

Oh, those old Mississippi river boats! I swear when I remember them, the fleets of Solomon, the galleys of Cleopatra, the state barge of Venice — all the glorious argosies of history pale and dwindle. We voyaged, surrounded by mirrors, gilding, veneering, plush, and panels; we ate and drank whatever was best or richest in the country; the captain was an elegant creature in a dress-coat who, when the hour arrived, came and took the oldest or most important of the ladies by the hand, and led her to the dinner-table and placed her there with French graces. A horde of negro boys in white jackets waited on us; it took half a dozen of them to do one man's work, but what of that? They were the most idle, good-natured, untrustworthy, amiable rascals on earth, and they brought us the most Olympian mint-juleps that ever mortal tasted, and blacked our boots to the utter perfection. In the evenings the piano went gayly in the grand saloon; white organdies and laces spread like drifts of snow on the guards; poker and seven-up flourished on the lower decks. Who could have counted the pretty girls, darky roustabouts, bowie-knives, duelling pistols, packs of cards, and flasks of Bourbon on one boat ascending or descending that murky tide? They were as the sands of the seashore in number. Sometimes one had as much as three weeks of these unalloyed delights on the

way up-stream from New Orleans to Cincinnati. Talk of your Rhine or your Nile after *that*, if you have the face! I have seen the Lorelei, and I may yet see the Pyramids, but I am sure neither one of them could give me such a thrill as overtaking the *General Jackson*, full steam up, and rumbling like a volcano, everybody crowding to the rails, cursing, screaming, betting, and passing her victoriously — "just as if she were standing still, begad, sir!" Not infrequently the winner's boiler "let go," in the classic phrase, shortly after one of these trials of speed, and Bludsoe's ghost went up alone in the smoke of the *Prairie Belle*. There was always the chance. Can you match that on the Rhine?

It is easy to see that with such a diversity of company and entertainment even George Ducey might find his level; and he did, somewhere or somehow, being entirely ignored by Quitman, his staff, and the other army men who happened to be passengers on our boat. Burke, having seen that George was comfortable, conceived that he himself had done all that duty required, and left the young man more or less to his own devices. I think the latter was quite satisfied with the arrangement; he heartily disliked his protector, as was natural. I don't know how he passed his time, but very likely he made more friends than Burke himself, who was too much occupied with thoughts of home. He had heard from Mary at last; the letter came just before we left the City, a flatteringly affectionate letter full of proud talk about her "hero." Nat used to get it out and read it over and ponder its pretty sentences in alternate fits of hope and confidence, and of deadly misgivings. He raged at his own distrust, he despised his jealousy, yet could not banish it. He would have given worlds to open his heart to Jim — but how could he? *Noblesse oblige!* and deep within him, Burke knew that even if they could bring themselves to talk about her, the brother would evade his questions. "Nobody is ever frank with you about a thing like that. They only tell you what they see you want to hear," said Nat to himself, rather bitterly. I dare say Colonel Burke was a dull, grumpy companion these days, for all his military titles and distinctions; indeed, army celebrities were a drug in the market with us, and any brisk youth with a turn for cards and throwing dice was much more popular. As Nathan was lounging one

afternoon on the guards with his chair tilted back, while he surveyed the low, hot, melancholy landscape sliding by (a sort of gloomy pastime which he rather affected at this time), two men sauntered up, took a turn along the decks in front of him, and finally came to a halt against the rail a few feet away. Nat looked up absently, but neither noticed him; they went on talking without lowering their voices. "Yep, you want to look out, son," said the elder, who had gray hair and looked like a planter in a small way, well-to-do, but not rich; he addressed the other in good-natured warning. "Take my advice, and don't get mixed up in any card game on these boats. They're chock-full of sharks and swindlers, and they'll do you every time. I don't want to *run* you, you understand; I'm just telling you because you look to me like a young fellow that ain't had much experience, huh —?"

"Oh, I dunno. I've been around some," said the other, apparently a little nettled at this patronage; he was a very young man. "This is my second trip. First time was with Dad, though. I guess I've got my eye-teeth cut, or the old man wouldn't have let me go off by myself. I'm going to buy hogs — got to go up to Kentucky. I reckon I'll get off at Paducah."

"Yes, I know. You hadn't ought to go showing your money around like I saw you last night, either," said the other, shaking his head reprovingly; "you'll get in trouble first thing you know. These card gamblers, minute they see a man has a little money, they lay for him — ain't that so, Mister?" he appealed to Nathan confidently.

"Shouldn't wonder. I've been told so," assented Burke, amiably.

"There, you *see*," said the mentor, turning to his young friend triumphantly; "this gentleman says so, too, and he looks to be a man that would know. Can't fool *you* much, I guess," said he to Burke, knowingly. "Why, what d'ye think? Yesterday there was a fellow come up to me in the bar, and we got to talking like a person does, you know, and presently he says: 'Say, I bet I know a card trick you can't beat.' 'All right,' says I, 'less see it.' Well, he got out his cards, but he only took three, and — say, you got a deck, Major? I could show you the trick a heap quicker'n I can explain it."

"Don't believe I have — not in these clothes, anyhow," said Nathan.

"Pshaw, is that so? Here, wait a minute, I got some cards in my stateroom —"

"Hold on," interrupted the younger man; "I've got a deck," and he brought out an exceedingly dirty and greasy collection, and moved up a chair. "Don't know that the whole fifty-two are here, but you said you only wanted three, didn't you?" he inquired with a charming ingenuousness.

"Three's enough. Gimme the Queen of Spades for one, will you? I reckon I'll be kind of awkward at it, but I can show you something the way he did it. He took and threw the cards around, backs up, kind of careless like, y'know, and then says to me: 'Now you pick the baby,' and I —"

"The baby's the Queen of Spades?" inquired Nat, beginning to show an innocent interest.

"Yes. Just like this, y'know, he threw 'em around. There, I did it better that time. Can you pick her?"

"Huh, that's easy enough!" said the boy, with contempt. "I saw her plain when you flipped her down. It's the middle one." He stretched out his hand and turned over the card which proved to be "the baby" sure enough.

"You got me that time," said the other, and laughed. "The way the fellow did it 'twasn't so easy, though. Bet you can't pick her now."

"Bet you fifty cents I can!"

"Aw, fifty cents!"

"Well, bet you five dollars then!" said the boy, defiantly, and got the money out and flung it down on the seat of the chair. "It's the card over farthest to the left — my left, I mean."

"All right, I'll just take that bet," said the instructor. "Which do *you* say it is, Cap? D'ye agree with him?"

Nathan brought the front legs of his chair down hard; he studied the cards with a knotted brow; he considered deeply, rubbing his chin, while the others eyed him. At last, "I give it up!" he announced with a mild sigh.

The left-hand one, on being exposed, was the Queen of Spades again. "Pretty easy money!" said the younger man, gathering in his winnings with a triumphant chuckle. "You'd ought to have bet my way, Mister."

"You can't do it three times hand-running," retorted the planter.

"Can't, hey? I'd like to know why not. It's as easy as easy. All you got to do is keep your eye peeled."

And, amazing to relate, he did win a third time — and then lost — and then won again twice, at gradually increasing stakes, while Burke looked on admiringly. "You've got pretty good luck guessing," he remarked.

"Take a try yourself, Colonel," said the youth. "'Tain't much of a card trick, far as I can see. Take a try."

"I've got a kind of superstition about cards," said Burke, sadly; "never hold any hands, or have any luck."

"I ain't having much myself with these cards," said the planter, rising — and was it fancy, or did the two exchange a fleeting glance? "They're too durned old and sticky — I can't handle 'em. Wait till I get that pack out of my cabin."

As he went off, the boy leaned forward, with his face close to Burke's and whispered: "Say, Mister, on the dead level, 'tain't luck. I've got the baby card marked with a little picked-up place in the middle of the back — you can see it easy if you squint a little sideways so the light strikes it. I done it with a pin under my nail when he wasn't looking. Say, you bet on it every time, and we'll clean him out. Or just once — for fun, y'know — just bet him once, hey?"

"Oh, I guess I don't want to take advantage of an honest old fellow like him," said the colonel, grinning.

The other drew back, scrutinizing Burke narrowly. He hesitated, then burst into a short laugh, got up, thrusting the cards into his pocket, and walked off. He was a big, powerfully built young fellow, not more than nineteen or twenty years old, with hardly a line in his heavy, sallow face — a promising rogue. Burke saw him joined by the other scoundrel a little farther along, and they strolled off together in search of easier victims, probably. On inquiry Nat discovered that the gray-headed man went by the name of "Canada Charlie" and was a well-known character on the river. "They say he's been known to clean up ten or fifteen thousand dollars on one trip," said Sharpless, who, on hearing of this adventure, immediately busied himself to collect further information. Jim was always at heart much more the journalist than the man of letters; men and women,

good and bad, high and low — everything interested him. He loved his trade of telling one-half the world how the other half lives, and brought to the practice of it, humor, sympathy, understanding, a great knack of enlisting confidence. He even had some little talk with Canada Charlie himself. "I spoke about his experience with you, Nat, and the old rascal grinned, but all he would say was: 'Yep, you can't skin an honest man — I've noticed it often.'"

"That was a pretty open speech for such a man to make," said Burke, surprised. "I can't see anything particularly honest about it, anyhow. It's just that this something-for-nothing-and-beat-the-other-fellow business always has struck me as all damn nonsense. You can't get anything without paying for it, and you don't want to when all's said — you'd rather pay."

"Mr. Canada Charlie's profession is evidently based on the opposite theory, and I suppose his experience points that way, too." said Jim. "Naturally he wasn't very expansive about himself. I asked him if he generally travelled with a friend. He said sometimes, not always; he intimated that a partnership was convenient, but had its drawbacks — like dividing up the haul, I dare say, though he wasn't explicit. He picked the young man up in New Orleans, and says he's a smart boy. Hope they won't get hold of George, Nathan."

"Oh, George is safe — he hasn't got any money," said Burke with a laugh.

Quitman's home was in Natchez, Mississippi, and on our arrival there, the general "was received with every demonstration of honor. He was saluted with cannon captured at Alvarado, and afterwards escorted into the city by a civic and military procession, and Wm. T. Martin, Esq., in a strain of impassioned oratory, welcomed the hero home. . . ." All of which you may find in the issue of the *Natchez Sentinel* for the following day, and I can personally testify to the accuracy of the account. The "cannon captured at Alvarado" were going at intervals all day with a stunning uproar — which, in view of the fact that at this "capture" nobody on either side had fired a single shot, seemed to Burke a little inappropriate. The streets were packed, the applause deafening. A parade led by a brass band, a delegation from

the Masonic fraternity, another of survivors from the battle of New Orleans, another of invited celebrities, the bench and bar of the city in a body, the mayor and council and all the prominent citizens, marched out to General Quitman's beautiful home a mile or so from town, and welcomed us in state. WM. T. MARTIN, ESQ., — who was a long, lank young man with a richly rolling voice, fiery black eyes, and a great mane of black, shining hair which he tossed back and shook back and combed back from his face with dramatic movements, — WM. T., I say, fairly submerged us with his impassioned oratory. "How wonderful!" says he — putting his hair back with one dash of his left hand, while he thrust the right into the breast of his black frock-coat — "how wonderful is it that this very city, bearing the name of a noble fragment of the Aztec race, who, driven from Mexico by the sword of the Montezumas or of Cortez, found shelter on this bluff, where their proud name is still preserved — how wonderful is it that from their ashes should have appeared an avenger of their wrongs, and that our Quitman (*frantic applause*) from fair Natchez (*more applause*) was the instrument in the hands of Providence to 'spoil the spoiler.'" He might well call it wonderful; to him alone belongs the glory of discovering this important historical fact, and we all listened in respectful astonishment. "I do not attempt to quote his burning language," said the *Sentinel* next day; nor shall I. Burke's general rejoined in a manner that became him well, giving and taking credit where it was due, and thanking everybody in a very manly style, if it might have been more simple. "I will not repeat what, no doubt, ere this, you have been wearied of reading —" he said — and then, like many another orator, before and since, went to work and repeated it!

"Shall I tell you how this devoted band of less than half a score thousand men, penetrated into the Mexican Valley through a line of all but impregnable batteries, thrice and again defeated an enemy of four times their numbers, took guns by the hundred and prisoners by the thousand (*applause*), and raised the starry banner of Columbia (*cheers*) over that citadel where, since the entry of the Spaniard, no alien flag had ever waved? No, my friends, I shall not dwell upon these deeds, but one egotism I *shall* commit — I was amongst

the foremost to cross the barricades of the city, after a determined resistance, and it was my happy fate that, at my personal command, the Stars and Stripes were first flung to the wind of Mexico above the palace (*tremendous applause*). And now when shall we gather the fruits of our conquest? I speak out boldly as I spoke when the Texas question came up. I say, KEEP this country (*wild applause*)! It is its fate. It is our fate. We cannot shirk this responsibility!"

And, after a good deal more in the same heroic vein, amid frequent outbursts of hurrahing, the general at last sat down. I think he had one eye on the presidency at this time — it would have been difficult to name a general in our army who did not once in a while look in that direction; but, if ever there was an honest man, it was Quitman, and if he was talking for effect, it is my solemn belief he didn't know it.

In the evening we had a banquet where all the notables in the place, that is, about three-fifths of the whole male population — the rest were colored — sat down, and there was a great deal of good eating and ditto drinking. Toasts were called — by WM. T. MARTIN — and responded to, and there were interludes of music. The *Sentinel* has it all:

"'The President of the United States.' *Music: Hail Columbia.*

"'General John A. Quitman, "Second to None!"' *Music: Hail to the Chief.*

"'The Memory of Washington.' *Music: The Dead March in Saul.*"

And so on, through General Taylor and General Scott, the Army, the Navy, the Heroes of the Revolution — never since have I sat through so exhaustive a list. We actually even sifted down to The Hardy Sons of Ohio and Colonel Nathan Burke (*Music: Pop goes the Weasel*)! Alas, when he arose, the unfortunate colonel could not get out a word, and but for the presence of mind of WM. T. MARTIN, ESQ., nobody knows what might have happened. For that gentleman, taking pity on him after a few moments of Burke's stammering and stuttering, rose up, and remarking gracefully that the situation and the honorable confusion of the chief actor reminded him strongly of an incident in the life of the

great Father of his Country (*prolonged applause*) when under very similar circumstances he received the thanks of the Virginia Assembly, added: "Sir, I will say to you in the words of the Speaker on that occasion: 'Sit down, Colonel, sit down! Your modesty is equal to your valor, and I can say nothing in higher praise of either!'" Whereupon, to an accompaniment of cheers, Colonel Burke did most gladly and thankfully sit down, and I have no doubt everybody else was as much relieved as himself.

But now, the Press of America being toasted, up got Mr. James Sharpless,—Major Sharpless, as he appeared in the papers next day,—put *his* thick black hair back from *his* brow with one hand, stuck the other into the front of *his* frock-coat, and began. He said — but what didn't he say? He quoted history, he quoted poetry, he quoted the Bible and Shakespeare — the eagle screamed and soared, the starry banner waved, the cannon thundered throughout his speech. Wm. T. Martin was nowhere beside him, a mere squib in the glare of Jim's rockets and red fire. The chivalry of the South, the principles of Democracy, the glorious institutions of Freedom — I don't think he neglected one of the well-worn topics or phrases. And such was the enthusiasm he aroused, that when, after winding up with a fervid eulogium of Mississippi, Natchez, and the present meeting, — where, he said, he had heard such oratory as it had never been his fortune to hear before,—he resumed his seat, he had to get up twice in response to the applause; and sat down again, with an almost imperceptible wink at Burke as he emptied his glass of whiskey and water.

General Quitman and some others of the older company left, I think, shortly after this. But, to tell the truth, neither Colonel Burke nor Mr. Sharpless, nor — I have a strong suspicion — most of the rest of us, ever had but a very hazy idea of the subsequent proceedings. And, waking up late with a raging headache the next morning, the colonel found himself the owner of a coat several sizes too small for him, and a brand-new gold-headed cane the like of which he was not in the habit of carrying; and received, in the course of the day, two invitations to dine, and twenty-five dollars in payment of a bet from gentlemen whom he did not remember ever to have seen or heard of before in his whole life!

CHAPTER XIV

In which Colonel Burke gets his Discharge

Burke parted from his late commander at Natchez with a regret which I believe the general shared. He was quite sure of his brevet from Washington, sanguine, visionary, and enthusiastic as a boy, full of plans for the new conquest of Mexico in which he was very anxious for his ex-aide to take part. "Raise a regiment, Burke, you could easily raise a regiment, a man of your prominence at home in your own State, and abroad — hundreds would flock to your standard! I have no doubt, for that matter — although this is, I need hardly tell you, in the strictest confidence — I have no doubt that, by bringing a little *judicious pressure* to bear upon the *right parties* —" Quitman explained with a fearfully diplomatic look — "by the aid of a *little* influence, you could get a brigade. We shall need, on a careful calculation, fifty thousand men, with which we ought to overrun the whole country, garrison every State capital, and take every considerable city. . . ." Burke had to decline this opportunity to the other's real — if only momentary — disappointment. But they shook hands heartily and said their good-bys with not a little feeling on both sides; and the next Nat heard, the general had given up all idea of war and conquest, beaten his sword into a ploughshare, and settled down to the pursuit of law, and — intermittently — politics in "fair Natchez" where he never ceased to be popular and beloved. He had a stormy time of it afterwards — for those were stormy days — as governor of the State, and member of Congress; Burke used to read his speeches, his protests, his "open letters" in the papers, and smile over their characteristic ardor, and the well-remembered periods. The last time I saw him was in Washington about a year before the War, when he looked badly and talked in a rather bitter and gloomy strain about the ingratitude of republics — never having got any

nearer the highest awards than an unsuccessful candidacy for the vice-presidential nomination! But he brightened presently, and spoke with all his old warmth of a meeting of the veterans of his old Palmetto Regiment ("my gallant South Carolinians") which he had been invited to visit and address; he was even then a very sick man and died only a few months later.

Our young men now continued their northward journey, missing the late stir and companionship, yet maybe not entirely sorry to have a little less notice and more quiet. Gradually the officers and semi-military followers of the army with whom they had been travelling all this time, reached their homes, disappeared from the boat and were replaced by other passengers. The curiosity to look upon war heroes waned; other news than that from Mexico began to occupy the newspapers and fill men's mouths. There were rumors that gold had been discovered in California; emigration to Oregon, buffaloes, Indians, the Great American Desert — our campaigns were already stale beside these topics. At one small town on the levee we saw a Mormon encampment, tents, live stock, and covered wagons drawn together in a surly isolation, bound for that well-nigh illimitable West; we saw them and remarked with irreverent wonder on the extremely bad taste in female looks manifested by the followers of the prophet. And, among the adventures of this not at all adventurous trip, Colonel Burke will always recall having fallen in with a voluble, confiding youth, by name Decatur P. Gage, a clerk in the office of Messrs. Fielding & Hall, Attorneys of St. Louis, whither he was returning after having been sent out to collect information about a case coming up for a new hearing on appeal before the Circuit Court next spring. This was Mr. Gage's first important work for the firm; and, finding out that Burke was a lawyer, he forthwith entertained the colonel with an extraordinarily long-winded account in minute detail of the whole thing: all about a negro who had been brought by his master from Virginia into the free territory of Missouri fifteen years before, and had been married and had children, and been left as a legacy wife, children, and all, and about whom it appeared there was now a grave dispute. "The nigger's worthless," said young Gage, in response to a question; "but

that isn't the point, you know. Point is, is he *free?* If we get a judgment on the ground of technical false imprisonment ever since he's been in the free State — under the Compromise that ought to emancipate him, you know — why, then we — I mean, *he* could bring suit against the estate for his wages all that while. There'd be something in it, you see, or old man Fielding wouldn't have taken it up. I — I mean, you know," he added in dire confusion; "I mean Scott's got a case, or our people wouldn't have acted for him. That's the nigger's name — Dred Scott."

This young gentleman left us at St. Louis, where we arrived at such an outrageously early hour, that Burke, who allowed himself some indulgences after his recent hardships on the march, was still in bed; and he was snoring soundly when Sharpless, who was always a much earlier bird, owing perhaps to the distressingly irregular habits of his profession, and who had got up in the express purpose of seeing the place, came knocking at the stateroom door. "Burke! Nathan! Hi, there! I say, wake up!" cried Jim, and kept up a prodigious shouting.

"Hungh? Ungh? What's the matter?" says the gallant officer, drowsily; and he lumbered out of bed, and unlocked the door, still half asleep.

"Where's your watch and money? Are you sure you've got 'em?" said Jim, grinning inexplicably after this insane question.

"Hungh? Why, of course. There they are in my waistcoat under the pillow. What's up? Boat on fire?"

"No, oh, no — we're tied up safe and sound at the landing. It's St. Louis, you know. And, Nathan," said Sharpless, solemnly, sitting down on the foot of the bed in a very deliberate and impressive manner, "Nathan, some of us have gone ashore already. I saw 'em scurrying down the gang-plank with their carpet-bags. They made for the shore, *magno telluris amore!* — and got into waiting chariots — hacks in the vulgar tongue — and were whirled from my vision! Who knows where they've gone, or what has become of them?"

"Well, what of it? What under the sun are you talking about?" said Burke in bewilderment. "We don't all have to get off the boat, do we?"

"Why, no, certainly not. That's the reason I was so interested in these pilgrims. They didn't merely get off the boat; they left — skipped — lit out — vamosed — stood not on the order of their going. They didn't see me, and I — *I* made no effort to be seen. I said to the genial sprite that dispenses refreshment to the thirsty, 'Barkeep, seems to me those three men are in a kind of a hurry.' He grinned frightfully and answered, 'Yes, sir, them kind 'most always leaves in a hurry.' And all his attendant afrits in the white jackets laughed in chorus: 'Yah-yah-yah! Yessah, boss, dey sho'ly does. Yah-yah-yah!' 'One of 'em,' says I, then, 'is that three-card-monte man, — the old fellow with the gray hair, I 'mean. And that youngest one is his partner — "capper," I understand to be the classic term — but who is the other?' None of them would acknowledge to knowing anything about him, except that they had seen him in company with Canada Charlie a good deal the last few days. And at last one said: 'Why, boss, didn't he get on with you-all at N'Orleans? Ain't that the same young feller that's been on sence this hyer boat done started?' And, lo, Nathan, I knew who it was all the time, but kept my mouth shut, because —"

"Was it really George?" Burke asked, wide enough awake now. "Are you sure?"

Jim nodded. "I suppose Canada Charlie has taken him into partnership — it looked like it. They all got into the same carriage, and were plainly in company. I went back to George's room. It's all cleaned out. He's gone for good."

"The boat lays up here for the day," said Burke; "we may run across him in the town."

"Not likely. What would you do, anyhow?"

"Why, I'd try and persuade him to come along home and see his mother. Honestly, though, you can't blame him much for not wanting to face the people at home; even George must see that everybody don't approve of him. Oh, well!" ejaculated Burke, philosophically; "I guess we're out of it, anyhow, Jim. We did our best for him. I'm going back to bed and get some more sleep."

When they went ashore after breakfast, some three or four hours later, the two friends did indeed keep a sort of lookout for George as they walked about; but, as they had

expected, the young man was nowhere to be found; nor did they even catch sight of his companions, although they visited some of the best-known saloons and gambling dens with which the place was so plentifully provided. St. Louis, even at that date, was a big, busy city; it would have been an easy matter for George to avoid them, and their search was more or less half-hearted and perfunctory. To tell the truth, after George's recent vicissitudes, his present association did not seem to either of them particularly disgraceful or distressing; it was but another variety of step in that Rogues' March upon which he had entered years ago. Canada Charlie had grown gray in this trade without getting into the Penitentiary — "and old Mr. Marsh always used to say that George would keep out of *that*, anyhow," said Nat, with a laugh. There is a well-defined point in every scoundrel's career when people cease to be hopeful or even desirous of reforming him; they will thank the kind Fates merely to keep scandal about him hushed up! "I hope at least he will write his family and get up some story they can believe, or pretend to believe," Burke thought, wondering if news of their return had reached the town yet. The papers would have barely kept pace with us; and such were the hazards and delays of the road in those days, that no one could appoint with any certainty a time for his arrival or departure; it was possible that our letters, written weeks before from Mexico, might not yet have been received.

Not that Colonel Burke expected his fellow-townsmen to turn out and greet him with drums, cannon, and banners; he had done nothing to deserve especial notice, and, besides, had had quite enough of that species of welcome in General Quitman's company, and was well pleased with his present comfortable obscurity. Yet I think he spent some idle moments picturing the pleasant surprise and interest of his friends when he should once more show his tanned face among them on the familiar streets after all these hundreds of miles and days. It was nearly two years; a great deal may happen in that time — a great deal *had* happened. He felt much more than two years older, and, in fact, used to glance into the glass with a little anxiety nowadays, as he shaved himself of a morning, at the lines wearing deeper around his eyes and mouth, at the widening streaks of gray

on his temples. We are assured that it is a man's privilege to be homely; and I suppose if he looks old and wrinkled into the bargain, it should cause him no distress. But poor Nat thought that he had never laid eyes on such a scarecrow as he had become; nor could all the magnificent new neckties, studs, fancy waistcoats, and what-not, which he feverishly purchased of the Cincinnati haberdasher at the next stopping place, improve him. Why was Mr. Burke in such a state of mind about his looks, to which — I freely confess — he had never given a thought before? And why, as they neared the journey's end, and the days went by with a maddening slowness, was he irritable, and impatient, and uproariously good-natured, and morose, and meditative by turns? If you can find among your acquaintance some young man who has been two years separated from his sweetheart — she is, of course, the most beautiful and fascinating girl on earth — and feels, for certain reasons, a little dubious about his reception, and never has been too sure of her at any time, and means to insist on her marrying him at once and put an end to his torments — I say, if you can find such a young man, ask him what ailed Nat Burke, and he may be able to tell you.

If Sharpless suffered from these alternations of temper in his friend, he charitably refrained from resenting them; he was quite acute enough to perceive their cause, and whether the spectacle touched or annoyed or only amused him, Jim's unlimited fund of sympathy and humanity kept him from betraying it. He himself intended stopping over a few days in Cincinnati, to see his publisher, or on some like business, and as Burke felt and plainly showed that he would as cheerfully spend a week upon the rack as in this particular city at the present time, they had to part company. In the dawn of a cold December day, Nat got up and took the train for home — an ordinary proceeding enough to modern notions, but something of an experience in those days, when the railroad was only partly built, and we had not yet ceased to marvel at the hair-raising speed an engine and train of cars could attain — fully twenty-five miles an hour, it was asserted. This road was one of the changes wrought in Burke's absence, and as it was not nearly completed, he must make the latter half of the journey by stage or horseback, as usual. It would

take him two days to cover the hundred and twenty miles — two days yet before he could see Her, malediction! Jim went along to the station to see him away; they were both a little depressed for some reason, Burke, who ought by rights to have been radiantly expectant, was very likely in one of his black moods, and the other may have been thinking with regret and longing of his own broken hopes. He was not much given to talking about himself, and, apart from his letter, had scarcely mentioned his rebuff. "You ought to ask her again," Burke once counselled him; "you took her by surprise, and maybe she didn't really know her own mind. Why, Francie couldn't *help* caring for you!" But Sharpless only shook his head with a rather twisted smile. "No, I've done. She as good as told me there was somebody else, you know." He had not been particularly enthusiastic or impatient about getting home, and several times talked restlessly of going to New York or Boston, whence he had had flattering offers.

Mr. Burke, then, pressed on alone with all possible expedition, which is not saying much, in spite of the new style of travel, as the stage roads were in a very bad state at this season of the year. And, although he had laid aside every kind of military dress, he found himself with his battered old baggage whereon the U.S.A. stamp was still plainly discernible, a good deal stared at by his fellow-passengers, who speedily finding out whence he came, displayed a kind but very searching interest as to his rank, age, pay, and experiences; and were profoundly amazed to hear that it sometimes rained in Mexico, and sometimes turned freezing cold, and that the country was neither one vast Sahara nor a jungle of palms and tropic fruits inhabited by every bird, beast, and reptile in creation like the island of the Swiss Family Robinson. By the time he had answered all the queries: no, he didn't know General Taylor — yes, he had met General Scott — no, he hadn't had the yellow fever — yes, he could speak Spanish — no, the natives were not black like negroes — yes, he had been in a battle — no, he couldn't remember how he felt exactly, but he didn't want to run away — yes, he had been wounded once — no, he had never happened to run across a private named Jake Brown — and so on and on endlessly, Nat began to weary of the theme; and accordingly

decided to make the last lap of the road on horseback, which he did, arriving in the town, a solitary traveller in the manner of Mr. G. P. R. James's heroes, the afternoon of the day before New Year's, 1848.

Dusk was falling and lights were beginning to stream out from the shops and houses and from the street lamps at the corners. There was snow underfoot; farmers' sleighs and bob-sleds were hitched along the curb. When a door here or there was opened, grand odors of frying ham and coffee saluted the wayfarer. It was not a pretty nor a picturesque scene; but the young man surveyed it with a great warming of the heart. Thank God, he thought, half smiling yet in real relief, no more women and babies crouching in the dust, no more beggars hideous with disease and deformity, no more adobe walls and tumble-down palaces gaudily or sombrely decaying like Tadmor in the wilderness! Here was peace, decency, freedom. A girl with a red shawl over her head ran out of a side door, and waited shivering and shrugging, with eyes fixed on some point a square off whence the sound of a loud, clear, penetrating whistle approached in company with a man's step on the plank sidewalk. Journeys end in lovers' meeting! Nat went on, coloring and smiling foolishly at his own thoughts.

He chose the quietest of the streets in a fit of shyness, and got to the hotel without being challenged or recognized. The clerk was a stranger, and glanced indifferently at "N. Burke" in the register. He was, moreover, very busy with a large catering order which the establishment must get ready to be sent out the next day, as he condescended to explain to several other guests newly arrived and waiting patiently about; Nathan was quite unnoticed in the bustle. He went upstairs to the room which they presently found time to assign him, and made an elaborate toilette, trying two or three of the new cravats hurriedly and nervously, at last pausing in the very act of selecting another — black, miraculously figured with trefoils or shamrocks in dull silk on a shining satin ground — and looking at himself in the mirror with an angry laugh. He threw the thing aside, and got into the rest of his clothes without looking again, finding his hand mechanically missing and fumbling for the hilt of his sword, and his belt and pistol; there they lay in

their black oil-cloth cases alongside his valise; the warrior was returned! He put carefully into his pocket a purple morocco case enshrining a chain and locket of filigree silver set with turquoise — Mary was one of those black-haired and white-skinned beauties to whom blue was ravishingly becoming; she looked pretty in anything, for that matter, the lover thought fondly, remembering with pride the dainty distinction of her walk, her dress, her little head with the shining, rich braids. As he was leaving the hotel office, a boy ran after him: "Supper's at six, sir, I was to ask would you be here?" "Why — ah — I don't know. No, I don't believe I shall," Burke said, hesitating; and bestowed on the lad — it was the Boots, I think — a tip the size of which evidently astonished that functionary even more than it delighted him.

Mr. Burke hurried along at a slightly less speed than if he had been running to a fire until he was within a block of the house when he, inconsistently enough, slackened to a very slow walk — a dawdle, in fact! She could hardly be expecting him — not at this precise moment, anyhow; his appearance might be too sudden, a sort of shock. It was inconsiderate — he ought to have sent a note — why hadn't he sent a note? To be sure he might do that yet; but to turn back now, after all this preparation, was beyond him. He could only force himself to walk slowly up the other side of the street, and stand a minute with his heart thumping in a ridiculous fashion against the morocco leather case and Mary's last letter lying together in his breast pocket. There was a light in her window — in all the windows; the house looked brighter than he ever remembered seeing it. On the front porch there stood some objects which he presently recognized to be a table and folding chairs and trestles, the furniture of some one of Mrs. Sharpless's sewing-circles, or Sunday-school classes, probably. It looked so familiar he might have gone away but yesterday. Why was he standing there in the cold and snow staring at those lighted windows? He wanted to collect himself, wondering at his own excitement; he was reminded, unpleasantly and inappropriately, of Rawdon Crawley's home-coming — the book was just out that year, and Nathan had bought a copy of it in New Orleans and read it on the boat coming up.

The maid of all work, coming to the door at his knock, was new and did not know him. Miss Sharpless had gone out, she said, looking the stranger over with interest.

"Out?" echoed poor Nat — he had never thought of that most natural chance, and was grievously disappointed. Yet why shouldn't she be out? She could not be expected to stay in the house for days, merely because he had said he would be home somewhere about the first of the year. He ought to have written a note, he told himself again in vexation.

"She's gone out sleigh-riding, sir," the servant volunteered with some excitement and subdued eagerness; she was a comely, fresh-faced young country-girl. "She said before she went that she knew it wasn't usual at this time, but she's awfully tired, and she thought maybe the air would do her good, and she'd be sorry to miss anybody, but she couldn't help it. And if there's anything you want to leave for her, sir, of course it'll be perfectly safe."

Burke heard the chatter uncomprehendingly, without indeed paying much heed to it. For him the main fact was that he must wait another while yet before seeing Mary. He was about to ask for her mother, when he heard that lady's voice from within, inquiring:—

"Is that the man with the méringues? Tell him to go around to the back door, Jennie. They ought to be kept cool. I think the wash-house will be the best place —" She appeared in the parlor door, one arm full of a cascading mass of satin, gauze, ribbons, white artificial flowers of some kind, taking a pin out of her mouth as she spoke. "Jennie, you can take this up and lay it on Miss Mary's bed. I think I've got it fixed right now. I'll attend to the méringues. Are you the man from —"

"It's I, Mrs. Sharpless," said Burke, a little awkwardly and nervously, afraid of startling her; he stepped into the light, taking off his hat; "it's I — Na —"

She stopped short, staring almost wildly; she turned quite pale and put out a hand to steady herself against the door-jamb, trembling. The satin and lace garment slid rustling to the floor, from which Jennie barely rescued it. "NATHAN — *Nathan Burke!*" gasped Mrs. Sharpless, shrilly; "what do you want? How did you get here?"

"I'm so sorry, Mrs. Sharpless, I didn't mean to scare

you," said the young fellow, much distressed. "I ought to have sent word, of course, but I — I felt as if I couldn't wait. I just got home to-day. Didn't you know I would get home about this time? I thought surely Mary would have got one of my letters — didn't she?"

"Mary get your letters? *Mary?*" repeated Mrs. Sharpless. "Have you been writing to her? Why, you *can't* have — what do you mean to do? What are you here for?"

"Why, where else would I go the first thing?" said Nat, in his steadiest voice, trying to reassure her, although he was inwardly a little concerned; Mrs. Sharpless was ordinarily a sensible and cool-headed woman; even if taken by surprise, she would not have gone into the hysterics on which she seemed to be bordering at the moment. She was evidently too startled by his sudden return to be pleased at seeing him. "I was thoughtless — I ought to have let you know. But then I supposed you'd be expecting me almost any day now, you see. I'll never forgive myself for giving you this shock, though."

She gazed up at him blankly, yet with a look in her face as of straining to understand, like one conscious of hearing important news but in an unknown tongue. She did not take, nor even see, the young man's outstretched hand. "Where's Jim?" she said abruptly. "Is he with you? Didn't he come, too?"

"He's well — he's all right —" Burke said quickly, thinking he understood at last, and anxious to relieve the mother's heart; "he came with me as far as Cincinnati, and I left him there. He'll be here inside the week. Jim's all right, safe and sound, and sent his love to everybody. Don't be worried about him."

"Did Jim write, too?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so. Yes, I'm sure he did. The letters haven't come?"

"Haven't you got any letters from us?" asked Mrs. Sharpless in a strange voice; "haven't you — no, wait a minute, Nathan — Colonel Burke, I mean — don't answer yet, I —I want to talk to you —" she commanded herself with a visible effort, and turned to the staring servant-girl. "Jennie, go upstairs. Take Miss Mary's dress upstairs, and then you can go back to the kitchen. The gentleman wants to see

me on business. He wants to see *me*," she interpolated hurriedly; "you mustn't disturb Mr. Sharpless on any account. Will you come in here, Mr. Burke?"

He followed her, puzzled and troubled, into the well-known little parlor, which now itself looked somehow strange. Mary's piano had been pushed back into a corner, and almost all the other furniture was gone; but side by side with this bareness the room wore a certain air of festivity; garlands of evergreen trimmed the curtains, and there were fresh white wax candles in the old girandoles on the mantel-shelf. The minister's wife did not ask him to sit down; she seemed to have forgotten all the everyday civilities, even when she had after a fashion regained her composure.

"I don't see what you wanted to come here for, Nat — Mr. Burke, I mean," she began with a kind of uncertain severity; "I can't understand it — unless it is that you don't *know*, and that's impossible. Why, you *must* have known — of course not the exact *day*, but I should have thought you wouldn't want to come, anyhow. It can't be that you —?" her voice trailed off into a questioning silence; she looked at him with something like fright in her eyes.

"I came to see Mary," said Burke, quite calmly, in spite of a wretched foreboding; "I do not know of any reason why I should not come to see her."

"But she wrote you — I *know* she wrote you. That is, she said she was going to. She *must* have written — why, she *had* to —" cried Mrs. Sharpless. "I *can't* understand it!"

"Nor I," said Burke, roused and peremptory. "What is all this about? Mary wrote me, as you say. I have her letter here. There is nothing in it to keep me from coming here, if that is what you mean. If she wanted to break with me, she hasn't said so —"

"*Nathan!*" Mrs. Sharpless almost screamed, "*nothing!* Oh, I knew you didn't know — I felt it from the first. You haven't got her letter, or else —" she flung out her hands with a despairing gesture. "Oh, I don't know how it's all happened. You ought to have known long ago. I thought you had been told. Nathan, Mary's going to be married."

"Married? When?"

"It's to-morrow — the wedding's to-morrow. She's go-

ing to be married to Leonard Andrews. They've been engaged since last August."

She paused, perhaps expecting a burst of questions, reproaches, anger, resentment. But Burke, after his first exclamation, stood silent. I do not think that he was stunned or overwhelmed. He was conscious only of a laborious effort to adjust his mind to the facts.

"Mary wrote to you in the summer, breaking off your engagement," Mrs. Sharpless began again, seemingly a little taken aback by his silence; "I *know* she wrote — she said so."

"She said so?" Nathan repeated. "I never got any such letter from her, Mrs. Sharpless."

"Well, Mary couldn't help its being lost, or going astray somehow — nobody could help that," said the mother, defensively; "Mary acted perfectly honorably with you, Colonel Burke, however you acted towards her."

"What is that you say to me?" said Nat.

Mrs. Sharpless flinched a little before his steady eyes, yet fronted him with spirit; the color rose in her delicate, aging face. "You couldn't expect any self-respecting girl to marry you after — after that story — you know very well what I mean — after that got to be known, Colonel Burke."

"Not if she believed it," Burke said. "I shouldn't want any woman to marry me believing a thing like that about me. I should want her to love me."

"Nathan, Mary *did* care for you — she *did* —"

"If she had, she would have trusted me a little, I think," said Burke. "Could any one have made me believe anything against her?"

"But that would be *different* — and you oughtn't to talk that way about Mary," said Mrs. Sharpless, indignantly; "as if Mary would — would do anything wrong! It's shameful to say things like that. How could she help believing it? You never denied it. If it wasn't true, why didn't you *say* so? Why didn't you *prove* it wasn't true?"

"You forget that I didn't know Mary accused me," said Nathan; "one cannot prove or disprove such a story. You know that in your heart, Mrs. Sharpless, and so does Mary, and so does everybody that hears it. If you choose to believe it, you will believe it — that's all. I might say that I

have the name of an honest and decent man — that goes for nothing! I might say that if the story were true, I would not have the effrontery to be here now, in your house — that goes for nothing, too! As you say, I knew very well what people here were reporting about me — Jim told me when he came down to Mexico a year ago; I might deny it or tell my side, but it would come to the same old question in the end — do you believe me, or don't you believe me? I thought at least the woman who was to be my wife would stand up for me. She couldn't, it seems; and that was perhaps natural —"

"Oh, it's easy for you to talk, and make out a good case," said Mrs. Sharpless, with an extraordinary mixture of doubt, worry, regret, uneasiness, and genuine distress showing in her face. "You're a lawyer, and they always know how to talk and argue. And, anyhow, it's not my doing, Nathan, I don't know what you want to talk this way to *me* for. I never *wanted* to believe anything against you — nobody could *want* to think that horrid thing true, you know — I don't see how you can say that. But Mary — Mary's always had her own way ever since she was a little girl, and I — I — why, she couldn't *help* breaking off the engagement. If you could have heard how everybody talked — not Leonard, you know," she interrupted herself quickly; "Leonard's never said a word, though he was coming here all the time, and had plenty of chances, but he — he hadn't asked Mary then, and I suppose he thought it wouldn't be honorable to talk about you. It's terrible you didn't get her letter — that would have saved you coming here just at this time. I'm so sorry it happened this way — it makes it so hard for you —" and here Mrs. Sharpless, appearing by some inexplicable feminine process to have actually wrought herself into some kind of sympathy for the young man, either as a discarded lover, or a victim of scandal, or both, broke into little sobs, carefully subdued, even in her excitement, for fear of disturbing the reverend gentleman in the study across the hall. It was as if she were divided between maternal loyalty, and an agonizing suspicion that somebody — not Burke alone — had done something wrong; a note of defence and explanation sounded through her words. The spectacle of her tears would have moved him unbearably at any other

time; but just now Nat was pardonably, I think, if selfishly, absorbed in his own affair, and something in her speech had caught his attention.

"Andrews was coming here all the time, was he?" he asked.

"Why, yes — Mary couldn't *help* it, you know. Young men have always come to see her; she's so attractive. And he knew she was engaged; Mary never tried to hide that. I'm sure he never said a word to her — proposed, you know — till last August, and then Mary wrote to you right away," said poor Mrs. Sharpless, innocently, in the eagerness of her justification. "I know Leonard never mentioned your name — nor that story, nor anything. He wouldn't take advantage of such a thing. Leonard's very honorable. They did have a little tiff once. I know when it happened, in the fall sometime, because he didn't come to the house for two or three days. But they made it up, and I'm sure it wasn't about you."

Nathan thought of the letter in his pocket, with its graceful endearments. These dates fitted only too well. Her "hero" indeed! And I suppose his expression must have astonished and rather frightened Mrs. Sharpless, for he almost laughed aloud in the suddenness of his illumination.

The mother's eyes searched his face; then all at once, she burst out vehemently; "Nathan, it's not so! It's not so, what you're thinking. Have you seen anybody? You have been talking to somebody. I know people were mean enough to say that. But it's not so; Mary never did a thing like that. Keep you dangling till she was sure of Leonard — oh, I know what people said! Who told you? They're all jealous of Mary. You haven't any *right* to believe that about her. It's not so!"

"What isn't so? What are you talking about?" said Burke, a little lamely, startled at the justice of her intuition. But before she could answer, Comedy intervened trivially upon the trivial Tragedy of this interview; the servant came knocking at the door, and partly opening it, in a highly natural curiosity. The méringue man had arrived; would Mrs. Sharpless please come? He wanted her to sign for them —

"Oh, *mercy!*" said the poor lady, in desperation. She dabbled the tears away hastily. "Can't he wait? Can't

you sign — there ought to be five dozen of them. Oh, well, I'll go then — "

She went away, leaving Mr. Burke to meditate upon the recent enlightenment; and it was hardly a pleasant five minutes that the young man spent alone with his anger, his jealousy, his disappointed passion, his sorely mortified vanity. That Mary should have thrown him over for a miserable bit of gossip was sufficiently bitter, but Nathan had generosity enough to allow that it was natural — it was what nine women out of ten would have done in her place, helpless, surrounded and worked upon by adverse opinion and spiteful or careless talk. If she had cared for him a little more — but it was cruelly plain to him now that she had never cared for him at all; he had had his moments of doubting her before, but that did not make the truth any more palatable when it was finally forced upon him. He had never been anything but a convenience with his attentions, his gifts, his handy devotion. Mary had had the like from some man all her life; it pleased her, it flattered her, she liked it; better he, Nathan Burke, than nobody. And, when the moment came, what a foil, what a goad, what a coquette's tool to egg on some other man! He ground his teeth on the thought. She had made Leonard fast without letting Burke go — admirable prudence and calculation! But what would she have done to get rid of me, thought Nat, with gruesome irony, if this scandal hadn't fortunately come up? It would have taxed even Mary's resources to have manufactured an excuse for dismissing him; but that she would have done it he did not doubt. The reflection that she might even have been capable of marrying him in case no better match presented, was as acid a morsel as the rest. For, alas, my friends, all poor Nathan's talk of his own unworthiness was, like that of other lovers, an unconscious sham, a piece of depreciation which you and I will utter of ourselves, but cannot stomach from somebody else; and, in his heart of hearts, I dare say Burke thought he was good enough for anybody. He was pacing up and down the narrow room, when the sound of sleigh-bells and of the vehicle drawing up at the door started him from his gloomy reviewing; and Mrs. Sharpless came hurrying back at the instant. "It's they — it's Mary — they've come back, you know. You — you'd better

go, hadn't you, Nathan? You don't want to stay *now*, do you? You can go out the back way if you hurry," she said, breathlessly appealing.

Burke almost smiled. He saw himself stealing out the back way like the villain or the guilty lover in a melodrama — he, who had done nothing! I believe there never was a crisis, no matter how supremely serious, that lacked some element of the grotesque.

"I said before that I knew of no reason why I shouldn't be here, and I don't now," he said.

"You're not going to *do* anything, Nathan?"

"Do I look as if I meant violence?" inquired Burke; "I assure you I won't do any harm to anybody."

She looked at him, hesitating; and the young man's heart smote him at sight of the distress in her face. For shame, Nat Burke, he thought remorsefully, what has this poor mother done to you? None of this is her fault; and what kind of a mother would she be not to stand by her daughter, and put the best front on it she can?

"Don't be worried, Mrs. Sharpless," he said gently; "I can't run away, you know. I don't mean to *do* anything, as you say. I should be the last man in the world to stand between Mary and her happiness. I only want to speak to her; and you yourself know that I am in no position to find fault with or reproach her."

She looked at him again, the tears rising in her eyes, and turned towards the door. They heard Mary's step on the porch, her hand on the latch — Burke thought he would have recognized the sound of her movements in a thousand. She was calling a gay good-by, and Andrews's voice answered her from the street. Mrs. Sharpless came back impulsively, and laid her hand on Burke's arm; her tears dropped and glistened on his coat sleeve. "Nathan," she whispered chokingly, "I never believed that story — I *can't* believe it. I don't care what anybody says — *there!*" She went quickly out into the hall. "Go in there, Mary. There's somebody to see you!" and she went on upstairs, treading more heavily than she used; and Mary came into the room.

She stood still at sight of him, her hands at her throat in the act of loosening her bright hood and scarf and thick white furs. Little silky strands of black hair had been blown across her

forehead, and she put them back mechanically, staring. She did not cry out or turn pale as her mother had done; perhaps Mary was much better prepared for such a meeting. Her clear and deep gray eyes met Burke's without faltering. Why should they? What had she to be ashamed of?

"Colonel Burke?" she said, after a moment, with a little rising inflection; and finished removing her wraps.

"I understand my letters haven't got here yet. I apologized to your mother for coming upon her so suddenly, but of course I supposed you would be looking for me," said Burke, striving unsuccessfully for an equal self-command.

She made a slight movement with her head and hands which might have meant assent, and sat down. To this hour Burke does not know whether she had received the letters or not. He went on: "It seems that other letters must have miscarried, for I — I didn't know that you — that I — that we weren't engaged any longer. I never heard from you, breaking everything off."

"After what has been reported about you, Colonel Burke," said Mary, folding her veil neatly and raising her calm eyes to his, "I am surprised you could have supposed yourself engaged to me any longer. I don't see that there was any necessity for me to write you, or how you could have expected me to say anything to you about it. You must have known that acting that way — doing what you did — would put an end to everything between us, if it ever was known. And of course it had to be known — those things are always found out. I am very much surprised that you came here at all."

She sat there, cool, sweet-faced, passionless, and delivered this little speech in a clear and level voice, assuming his guilt, and putting him in the wrong with a kind of serene assurance and finality. Burke looked at her — and all the affection, all the jealousy, all even of the helpless resentment within him, fell down and died without a struggle. What had he been worshipping all this while? Mary Sharpless, or a bright youthful vision she had some way embodied? To find her no angel, but a selfish and calculating woman, hurt him only in that it most ruthlessly forced him to destroy that young illusion; himself he grasped the pillars of his house of dreams, and shook it down. The selfishness that reared it was perhaps not so ugly as Mary's, yet of the same stuff when all was

said; I think he had been in love with being in love, not with Mary Sharpless; and it was Nat Burke's home and hearth and wedded happiness he had pictured so fondly, not hers.

"This is the end, then," he said, after a silence; "forgive me for coming. I did not know. Good-by."

He went toward the door. He had been so short a time in the house that the outer cold still clung about his clothes and heavy greatcoat. Mary's eyes followed him with a strange expression. Perhaps she had expected, and armed herself against, an angry scene of reproaches, protests, denunciations; his submission seemed to puzzle, almost to annoy her. His hand was on the latch when she spoke again — in an altered voice, and not nearly so composedly. "I — I — this is only the merest justice to myself — and — and others — only justice. You *must* see — you can't but understand that — that — that —"

"I do understand," said Burke, without rancor. Their eyes met again; in that last look, both perceived, with a sudden chilling of the heart, that something was gone from their faces and their lives, and would never come back any more. It was Youth. Nathan went out of the house, and closed the door.

Mr. Burke walked slowly back to his hotel, and slowly to the bedroom where all his gala clothes were still strewn about in disorder. Feeling in his pockets — not for a pistol or a vial of poison, O romance-monger, but, *tout bonnement*, for a handkerchief to wipe his nose! — he encountered the purple morocco case. He balanced it in his hand a moment, then threw it back into the portmanteau with a sort of laugh, and straightway went off and forgot all about it. Years afterward the thing turned up in his old army baggage with other rubbish in the garret, and was donated for a prize to be raffled off at one of the sanitary fairs they used to hold during the late war for the benefit of our men in the field!

His friend the Boots erelong came to the door. "We been kinder busy, sir, gittin' off the things for the weddin'-breakfast — there's a weddin' in town to-morrow," he said, mopping his tired brow; "supper's ready. Concluded you'd come back, after all, didn't you?"

CHAPTER XV

"'Here's Sorry Cheer!' quoth the Heir o' Lynne"

I believe it has been remarked elsewhere in the course of this history that if Truth, crushed to earth, will invariably rise again, it has still nothing like the tough and enduring vitality of a good lie. Not long since, Mr. Burke, sitting in his private office, which is separated from the profane vulgar by a rich screen or partition of woodwork and ground glass, heard, through his door, which happened to be hanging ajar, a scrap of conversation between two clients, meeting unexpectedly without. And said one: "Hello, does Burke attend to your legal business too? I didn't know that."

"Yes, oh, yes. Has for years; began with my father."

"Fine old gentleman, the old general, isn't he? Nice old fellow!"

"Yes, and it's strange they say he was a very wild sort of young man — not much good."

"Is that so? Drank, hey? Spree'd? I guess a lot of 'em drank pretty hard in those days."

"Well, no, I never heard that. No, it was women that was the matter with Burke, father used to say. Finally he ruined some poor girl, and it made a terrible talk. She died, and Burke had to get out of town; that was when he went off to the Mexican War, you know. It seems he was engaged at the very time to a nice girl here at home; but, of course, when she heard of it, she broke off with him — and the whole thing made a man of him. He straightened up after that, and never misbehaved again — at least not that anybody ever heard of, my father said. You'd never think it to look at him now, would you?" And here the aged reprobate behind the screen, signalling his presence by a stentorian cough, put an end to these reminiscences. After forty years of living with it, you might have supposed him habituated to the stigma, as the Indian fakir teaches himself to endure all sorts of bodily inconvenience, and goes about with one arm grown to his

side, or a nail through his nose, in great peace of mind; but Burke never quite learned their stalwart philosophy; and to this day that shameful imputation, old as it is and irremediable, has power to sting him deeply.

Although the scandal was a year old, and must have been pretty well turned over in that time, it got a fresh start with Burke's reappearance, and flourished magnificently. I can conceive that nowadays it might not have been so venomous, nor have so attracted and, as it were, concentrated the notice of the community; but in our small society, where everybody knew everybody else's business, where not one-fourth so much of public and outside interest distracted us as to-day, and where the young man had attained a certain prominence, the story went the rounds with incredible briskness, and, bad enough already, received nobody knows how many unsavory additions. The ladies, who were by no means the most backward in spreading it, were obliged in common decency and self-respect to pass this hero on the street without recognition, to close their virtuous parlors against him, to frown and shake their heads, and cast their blushing looks downwards whenever his name was mentioned — in public. And although the masculine half were, as is generally the case, most sinfully tolerant, and out of sympathy, or indifference, or sheer perversity continued to associate even with such a moral leper as Nat Burke, — who, strange to relate, attended to his affairs industriously, and appeared to be both upright and capable! — there were not a few who, in the presence of their womenkind at least, avoided the young man's company. They were married men, fathers of families, of young growing girls — what would you have? The domestic peace must be kept at whatever sacrifice of personal prejudice or opinion. I dare say Thomas, Richard, and Henry had their orders. And what if Mr. — or General as he was now called, for he got the brevet shortly after his return home — Burke, *was* dined by Governor Gwynne, and *did* receive a vote of commendation from the Legislature, and the gift of a beautiful sword, with a hilt of gold and mother o' pearl, "appropriately inscribed"? Let him get what consolation he could out of his military laurels — that didn't make a respectable man of him, Thomas. Nor a fit person to invite to our house, Richard. And I don't care whether you are asked to the banquet and

the presentation or not, Henry, you shan't go, and appear to approve of *that man* — would you like to have our little Toms, Dicks, and Harrys grow up to be like him?

Burke being, all testimony to the contrary notwithstanding, a young fellow of a certain solidity of character and very definite aims and standards, supported his ostracism without bravado, I trust, and without taking to strong liquors or other reprehensible courses. In truth, Nat was used to loneliness, as regarded feminine society at any rate. Few women had ever taken any interest in him, and he told himself that if they could do without him, he could perfectly well do without them. The grapes were very sour, I suppose. He had indeed some champions among them; for, coming out of church one day (the hardened libertine actually had the insolence to attend service quite frequently!) and passing through the crowd of skirts and bonnets as rigorously unnoticed as if he had owned Prince What's-his-name's cloak of invisibility, Nat found himself side by side with Miss Clara Vardaman — Miss Clara looking quintessential spinsterhood in her neat, thick, handsome silks and bugles, her lavender kid gloves, her sable muff, the gold eyeglasses on her slender, curving nose. "How do you do, Colonel Burke? Will you give me your arm down the steps? They're quite icy this morning," says Miss Clara, hardily, though with the color mounting to her high cheek-bones. Before the shocked gaze of every one she knew, her entire little world, she walked down the steps of Trinity Church, and along the sidewalk, clinging to his arm and chatting resolutely; and showed in doing it — you will pardon me for thinking — a real courage, the courage of a great lady and a kind heart.

"Bravo, Clara!" said the doctor, when Burke, smiling a little in spite of himself, described this incident to him; "she'll have to stand all sorts of pecks and stings from the women for that, you know, Nathan — dear angels that they are!" said Jack, somewhat cynically; his own love affair had ended as unfortunately as Burke's, if for a less serious cause. "I have another loyal friend in — who do you think?" said Nat, cheerfully; "why, Mrs. Slaney, to be sure! She says she knows — nobody better — that men will be men, and maybe I got tangled up somehow like Slaney did (I always have kind of reminded her of Slaney, he was just that sympathetic,

and kind of soft, you know, with women, and awfully free with his money, just like I am!) with some girl, but you can't make her believe it was all my fault. They're plenty of sharp, good-looking, brazen hussies around ready to get hold of a man like me, and twist him 'round their finger," said Burke, ungratefully imitating Mrs. Slaney's voice and manner, to Vardaman's huge amusement. The doctor was one of Nathan's few confidants; he could scarcely have talked to Sharpless — all circumstances considered — so openly.

Jim, arriving the week after his friend, and after the wedding of which he had known nothing, came around to the office next day, with a face of great perplexity, distress, and confusion. "I can't say much to you, Nat," he began abruptly; "I had a kind of uneasy feeling all along. Mother and father seem to have counted for nothing — like two dummies. They're both old, and they're too — too used to Mary, you know, to have any say. Mother feels pretty bad. She's always been very fond of you, and she's beginning to think now that you weren't treated right; she wanted you to come to the house, but, of course, I told her you wouldn't do that — it made her feel very badly. Women don't understand somehow; they all seem to think you can knock down Humpty Dumpty off the wall and pick him up again as whole as ever — spill all the milk and scoop it up again — begin just where you left off, and have everything the same as it always was! Mother feels as if she and father have been partly to blame, but I — I don't think they could have helped it. Mary wouldn't even put off the wedding when they heard there was a possibility of my coming home — her only brother! And I never was told anything about it — the engagement or anything."

"It's all right, Jim, old fellow, don't say anything more. It's only what I might have expected — any girl would have done the same. You see what everybody — all her friends — think of me," said Burke, not choosing that the brother should know any more of the story. And whether Jim suspected anything then or afterwards, I do not know, for we have never mentioned the subject and seldom even Mary's name, from that day to this.

The two had really not much chance to talk in private, during these days; for Sharpless was only at home for a short

time to see his family and friends and say his good-bys. He would be off in a fortnight for St. Louis, Council Bluffs, the Overland Trail to Oregon, and the gold diggings. Not with any idea of making his fortune — Jim appraised his own talents and disposition too justly for that, and no such illusion led him on. A certain restlessness possessed him; it had taken him to Mexico; it was taking him to California; it took him through later life to known, distant, populous cities and equally to all the lost and forgotten corners of the world. We never knew when he might burst in upon our humdrum hearths, bronzed and leathery, late from Alaska, New Zealand, Cape Horn — Heaven knows where! They say a rolling stone gathers no moss, yet I am sure Sharpless is very tenderly enshrined in the hearts of his friends, and particularly of his friends' youngsters, upon whom he was forever bestowing all manner of outlandish gifts picked up in his wanderings — sea-islanders' feather-cloaks, Egyptian scarabs, Hindoo idols, French dolls, miniature tea-sets of Japanese lacquer, Indian bows-and arrows — toys which the mothers alternately declared too dangerous or too beautiful to be played with. You may see them now in the corner-cabinets and bric-à-brac stands of a dozen parlors. I have heard the ladies sigh regretfully that it was such a pity Mr. Sharpless wouldn't marry; look how fond he was of pretty things and children. He was really very domestic, for all he *would* travel about so much — such a pity! He used to make barbarous parodies of the noble lines in "Ulysses," applying them to himself: —

> " — It little profits that with busy pen,
> Ink, paper, and the ever-needed stamp,
> I mete and dole untruthful words unto
> A set of savage editors
> That horde and sleep and feed and know not me.
> I cannot rest from travel —
> There lies the train; the engine puffs her steam;
> There glooms the dark, broad porter of
> The Pullman car —"

Jim would chant sonorously, and double up with iconoclastic laughter. He carried his bachelorhood bravely, and if I have sometimes surprised a look of wistfulness or loneli-

ness on his face at sight of some young mother with her baby, the child — Good Lord, the grandchild, nowadays! — of an acquaintance, it always passed quickly. We gave him a dinner, too, and presented him with a handsome gold-mounted shaving-set in a travelling-case, upon the occasion of this first departure; and all the papers, Whig and Democrat, described the ceremonies the next day, in articles a column long with many references to "our talented fellow-townsman." The public had generously forgotten or forgiven his heresies; and hardly anybody to-day would understand what the term meant as applied to his opinions.

All this while, in defiance of all the laws of retribution, the firm of Burke and Lewis prospered amazingly, undeterred by the return of the senior partner with his evil thick upon him. Young Lewis, whether he believed the gossip or not, did not allow it to disturb his own peace, nor his relations with the hero of it. He was a shrewd young fellow, with a good gift at estimating men's characters, as a pleader of no startling eloquence perhaps, but forcible, honest, humorous, and ready. It was remarked of the firm that one man uniting the special and separate qualities of its two members would have been a great lawyer; as it was, I suppose they were merely a notably strong alliance. It lasted for nearly thirty years, only dissolving when Lewis went on the Bench in 1875. One of the first visitors to the office after Burke's return was his ancient patron, Mr. Marsh. Nat, having heard on all sides that old George was failing fast, was very feeble, was growing childish, and so on, was agreeably surprised when he stumped in, apparently vigorous as ever, with eyes and hearing as keen as in the days of their first acquaintance, and with what looked like the same shabby tail-coat on his back, and the same grease-stains and dabs of tobacco in the creases of his waistcoat. His manner, however, was much more cordial than used to be natural with him, and he presently displayed a certain eagerness and volubility and disposition to talk about himself, which Burke was obliged to acknowledge inwardly, not without reluctance, to be a sign of the creeping years.

"I can't stay very long — that is, I won't stay very long," he announced, after the greetings were over; "I never did like people idling around an office. And then I have business of my own to attend to. People think because a man's

retired, he hasn't got anything to do. Well, that's a mistake; there's something for me to do, anyhow, I take notice, all the time. Now, where I board, there's a man setting a new grate in the back-parlor mantelpiece — got to tear out the bricks and set the grate all over on account of its smoking — and I've got to go back directly and keep an eye on that job. Don't make any difference how good a workman is, he'll bear watching — that's my principle. It's an exceptional man, anyway, that don't need a little watching, hey? I guess you remember me telling you that when you was keeping the books, hey?"

"Oh, I don't know, Mr. Marsh," said Nathan, amused. "I remember your telling me that responsibility was good for almost everybody, and that people ought to be left to their own devices sometimes, anyhow, if only to see what kind of an out they made of it."

"Well, you see you were always a tolerably steady boy, or I wouldn't have talked that way to you. That's what I tell Anne. 'He's always been a steady young fellow,' says I, 'and I doubt very much if all these stories we hear about him are true — wouldn't wonder if they were cut out of whole cloth. But even if they were true, Lord love you,' says I, 'if every young man that's behaved that way has got to go to hell for it, why, it's going to be mighty lonesome in heaven!' However," added the old gentleman, philosophically, "there ain't much use arguing with Anne when she's got her back up. *You* know that. Don't make much odds what I say, she always winds up with, 'Why, Uncle George, Georgie wrote us all about it exactly as it happened. He saw it all with his own eyes.' 'Huh!' I says, 'since when did George set out to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? It's been my observation he can lie like a missionary. And, anyhow, *what* did he see? By damn, I'd have liked to been there, and seen it, too! 'Tain't the kind of thing that's generally on view,'" said old George, concluding this exposition of his sentiments with a dreadfully significant wink and grin. "'Hm!' says Anne — you know how Anne says 'Hm!' Nathan, — and then told Francie to go out of the room, because she'd rather she didn't hear how her Uncle George talks! What's become of George, anyhow, do you know?"

Burke told him all he knew, but the other listened with a wandering attention, and before the young man had well finished, began to talk. "Got off at St. Louis, hey? Maybe Anne'll hear from him, then, as long as he's in this country. She hasn't had any word since you started from Mexico, I believe. She made me promise to ask you. I wanted to know why she didn't have you come up to the house and tell her all about him yourself, but she nearly went into screeching hysterics at the notion, and Francie begun to cry, and there was an infernal howdy-do. Made me pretty mad. 'By damn, ma'am,' I said to her; 'if Burke's good enough to take care of your son, he's good enough to have in your house. George may be a moral young man, but I ain't heard of his getting any promotion, and a sword from the community yet. Point of fact, I ain't heard of his doing anything, except get lost and found, and I take notice nobody's explained those circumstances.' How was that, Nathan? You ought to know."

"Why, that's about all there is to know," said Burke, and gave him an outline of George's story, omitting to mention, however, the society and conditions wherein Lieutenant Ducey had recovered his liberty. "No use going into that miserable detail," he thought.

"Well, maybe it's so and maybe 'tain't," said Mr. Marsh, impartially, at the end. "Can't relie on George. I thought likely he'd run away, deserted, you know, when I first heard it. Poor Anne! Pretty hard on a woman, having her only son turn out like George — pretty hard. She has a kind of an idea he ain't any good, but she won't acknowledge it to herself. She keeps talking about him being just a young boy, and his character ain't formed yet. But he'll never be any different, Nathan; I've seen George's kind before. Queer thing is somebody's always taking care of 'em, and helping 'em out, and worrying over 'em; their parents or kin or somebody."

"Well, it's very natural for Mrs. Ducey —"

"Oh, yes, Anne's all the time worrying around about somebody or something, anyhow. Every now and then she gets a spell of wanting to take care of me. And, damn it, Nathan, I don't want to be taken care of," said the old man, irritably. "Can't make her understand that, somehow. I haven't got

into my dotage yet, I guess. I can take care of myself; ain't as young as I was, of course, but I don't see any men of my age around that are any better preserved, now, — do you?"

Nat could and did assent to that with a clear conscience; for, in fact, there were few, if any, citizens of George Marsh's age in the place. "You don't look a day older to me, sir," he said — and it was quite true.

"I've got just as clear a head for business as I ever had in my life," pursued the veteran; "I drew out just because I wanted to. But I ain't on the shelf, by any means, Burke. I could get right back to work to-morrow, if I had to — if I lost my money, for instance. Not that I'm afraid of that; I've got it where it's safe, I guess. Landed property and ground-rents don't run away. I didn't leave but a little with Ducey, you know. Between you and me, Nathan, Ducey hasn't got any gumption — he ain't smart. I'll bet he's running behind right along, and has been ever since he's been by himself at the store, and probably don't know it, or don't know why, anyway. It'll be just like it was that time down in New Orleans twenty-five years ago, when they all got out and came up here. William had got through everything. William thinks now he's going to make a big thing out of these government contracts — for feeding the army, you know — same way I did back in 1812. 'Look here, now, you want to go slow,' I told him the other day. 'First thing you know the war'll be over, and that'll leave you with the bag to hold. Don't stock up too much; don't have too much on hand, or too much ordered. It's easy enough to get flour and bacon, without loading up with 'em.' No use talking; he thinks the war's going to last forever. Thinks we're going to keep on till we've conquered Mexico."

"I hope not!" said Burke, seriously; he meant it.

"Yes. I notice anybody that's seen war once, the way you have, has about got his bellyfull. But if Ducey don't bust himself that way, he will some other way," said Mr. Marsh, with a curious indifference. "I've known a lot of men got busted doing the very things I did, only they didn't know *how*. Why, they tell me now there's a big whillabaloo being raised over land-titles — property all around here in the old Refugee Tract, and right next door to where I bought.

People named Allen, claiming to be the heirs of an Allen that the United States gave some land to back in the Revolution time — a British refugee from Canada, I believe. I remember when that land came on the market at sheriff's sale — I've told you about it. You could buy it for nothing almost — and look at the value of it now! But these Allens are making out that the sale made a cloud on the title somehow, and I understand they've brought suit against all the owners — the ones that have the most valuable improvements, anyhow. Now you know I bought right at that time, and same place — the Refugee Tract; and I was a little anxious at first when I heard about the suit. 'I'll be the next one,' thinks I. But I've never heard a word out of any of 'em, or anybody else, and it's been a year now since the shindy began. Nobody's sueing *me*. I got out my old deeds and looked 'em over, and by damn, Nathan, I didn't buy any of Allen's land! I don't remember the circumstances now, but I must have had my suspicions at the time. My titles all come from a fellow by the name of Granger. People will tell you that's just old George Marsh's luck. They don't allow for old George Marsh's common sense."

"That's so," said Nathan.

"I don't deny it's given me some worry, Burke. This Granger now — it's funny there ain't any of his children turned up. All the land was in what we used to call McBride's Half-section, because McBride was one of the original proprietors, one of the fellows that bid for the site of the town, you know; and afterwards the speculation busted him, and the sheriff sold him out. He didn't buy of Granger exactly, either; as near as I can make out from the papers he bought of an agent acting for Granger. Would that make any difference in my titles, Nathan?"

"Well, I — I'd have to see the papers before I could say. But I don't believe you'll ever hear from any of Granger's descendants if they haven't begun on you by this time," said Burke, concerned at his old friend's evident uneasiness. "It would take a great deal of time and trouble and money for them to prove a claim, anyhow."

"Yes, I know that — that's one of the things that's worrying me," said old George, with impatience. "If anything got started now, why, it would be sure to last me out, and at my

death my property would pretty near all be tied up in a lawsuit. How'd poor Walter's children make out with a lawsuit? They're all women, and they haven't got any too much sense, anyhow. I guess I'll bring all my deeds down and have you look 'em over. You see, Nathan," he went on, almost apologetically, "everybody was careless about forms, you know, in the old days. We — well, we were just careless — I can see it now. Just for a sample: I understand these Allen people take the ground that there wasn't any appraisement of the lots made, and notice given properly — legally, you know, before the sale. Gilbert Gwynne was talking about that the other day, and presently he turned around to me and says: 'Why, here's somebody ought to know. Mr. Marsh, you were there at the time, weren't you? You remember those lots were all appraised regularly?' The governor owns some of that Refugee Tract land, too, you know. But I just had to own up; I had to say to him: 'Gil,' says I, 'I'll be damned if I remember a thing about it! They put 'em up at auction two or three times, and when we got good and ready, we all went in and bought, and that's every last thing I know!' It ought to be a matter of record, but I doubt if anybody has the scratch of a pen to show for it."

He went on talking in this strain for some time, by turns vaunting his shrewdness, explaining his anxieties, and calling on Burke for reassurance in a manner which betrayed a sad falling off. It was not entirely just, Burke thought, to call him childish, or even greatly failed; the strength of his character endured and showed by flashes still; but certainly he was no longer the hard, resolute, and self-confident man of a few years back. Burke found something namelessly depressing in the old fellow's softened ways towards himself, the warmth of his compliments, his proud assertions that he had seen there was "something in" his protégé from the first. In the old days Mr. Marsh would as soon have thought of giving Nat a stick of candy as of flattering or even commending him; it was enough for him to approve. He used at times to talk very freely to the young man about his affairs and experiences, but his talk was always clear-headed, apt to the moment, profitable. Now he would run on endlessly, prompted by nothing but the desire for companionship and sympathy, asking for the other's opinion, pleased at his interest —

which, Heaven forgive us, was often enough feigned, and very poorly feigned at that! It was touching. For, as time went on, old George's visits to the office increased in length and frequency; I think he had nowhere else to go, and it was the event of the day for him.

He invariably began by expressing his intention of staying only a short while — nobody ought to set foot in any man's office but the people who had business there — *he* knew that — he just thought he'd look in for a minute — he was busy at home, anyhow. And he never went away without mentioning the papers which he meant to bring down for Nathan to examine — he didn't believe there was anything the matter with them — guess it would take a smart man to find a flaw in *his* titles, old George Marsh's titles — still, it would make him a little easier — he would bring them the next day. The next day came, and he had forgot them, by damn! But whether he really did forget them, or kept up this ingenious fiction to persuade himself that he had business at the office, it would be hard to say. He had a stout hickory chair in a corner, and would sit there a whole morning, silent when clients came in or the place was busy — for he had most rigorous ideas about office discipline — quite talkative, jocose, and reminiscent at other times with Burke, with Lewis, — who was always patience and good-humor itself, — with our increasing squad of clerks — the lads were generally kind-hearted and civil enough, even if they did grin at each other behind his back. I have heard Mr. Marsh pitching them some extraordinary tale of my own parts and prowess when I was such as they — "Fifteen years I've known him, boys, fifteen years. I guess I've had plenty of time and chances to find out what kind he is. You'd get a pretty good line on a rascal in that time, hey? I've seen the world," he would observe somewhat ambiguously; and our Jacks and Jimmies would bolt incontinently into the outer hall, where we could hear their youthful guffawing. It was not a picturesque or stately decline; but I cannot in honesty dress it up or report it otherwise than as it was. If we could but choose the manner of our exit, and know when to expect the cue, what a grand business should we all make of it! But it is not a handsome thing to be old and tired and near our end; and whatever of sad or shabby was to be seen in old George

Marsh will probably be seen in you and me. God be with him, honest old pagan! — although I must think he would be somewhat ill at ease in any sort of spiritual company; and like better, indeed, to believe him sleeping alone and sound and dreamlessly under the green turf.

CHAPTER XVI

In which Mr. Burke receives and makes Visits

Burke, not having made any effort to "live down" the memory of the fault which he had not committed, and having made no change in his habits and way of life, was surprised and a little sardonically amused to find himself, after twelve months or so had gone by, gradually emerging, as it were, from the cloud of obloquy — undergoing rehabilitation. People get used to everything, and Nat, who was not particularly observant, and had accepted his isolation without protest, woke up with a start one day to the fact that he was being looked at, and in some cases bowed to, officially and publicly recognized — albeit rather stiffly and self-consciously — by a number of those amiable beings without whose influence society would be a mere mess of corruption. I do not know what forces were at work: perhaps the ladies were tired of the game; perhaps they discerned a chance to reform him; perhaps there was a growing opinion that he had been punished enough, and a desire to gather up the spilled milk, as Jim would have suggested. The poor wretch bore no malice; it is only women who feel a righteous enmity towards those who are in the wrong, and who will hate you sturdily for a difference of belief. He humbly and gratefully took off his hat to these signs — not of returning favor, he had not the conceit to think that — of reëstablished tolerance. All the husbands had long since relented, for convenience' sake, if from no kinder motive; and when William Ducey appeared at the office one fine morning, Burke might have known, if he had troubled his head about it at all, that the last of the barriers was down.

For, of all his judges, Mrs. Anne Ducey was the hardest and most implacable, as Nathan had observed with a sort of good-tempered and patient irony. He would have guessed it, even without old Mr. Marsh's reports. She could not forgive him for having laid her under certain obligations

— for, even if she did not know the exact extent of them, what she did know irked her pride. And again: whatever kind of man Burke had proved morally, he was at least moderately clever, strong, successful — was her George any of these things? She visited her disappointment on Burke's head, with a bitterness increased, it may be, by a consciousness of injustice; for Anne was an upright woman. But what mother's heart was ever governed by her head? I have lived a good while and made enemies in my time, and some friends, I hope, and have felt an enmity or friendship for others, and I will say flat that I never saw a like or dislike that was wholly logical; and if Mrs. Ducey's attitude seems unworthy or incomprehensible, it is because it was so simple and so natural. Undoubtedly it gave her a solid if unacknowledged satisfaction when Sin found out the hitherto reputable Mr. Burke, and judgment overtook him. Such an event always pleases everybody. The just man falls seven times — and how the world does love to see him fall!

So, then, nobody so rigid as Mrs. Anne in punishment, nobody so consistent. She would cross the street if she saw the culprit coming ever so far away; she would get up and leave her own front porch, she would turn her back in the yard when Burke passed. She made William avoid him like a pestilence; she had battles royal with her uncle on the subject of his inveterate regard for the young man, his frequenting of Burke's precincts. The old fellow used to detail them, grinning satanically. I believe the desire to plague Anne strengthened and confirmed his attachment. "She leads Francie a dickens of a life on your account, Nat," he once said; "Francie's got plenty of spunk, you know, in spite of her being such a quiet little thing, and she always has stood up for you. When that first letter of George's came, there was a flare-up, I tell you! Francie said there wasn't a word of truth in the whole story, George never told the truth, anyhow; she was sure he was just mad at you because you wouldn't lend him money, or help get him out of some scrape. Then Anne got up on *her* ear, and called her a wicked, ungrateful, slanderous girl without any affection for her own kin — as if that was an argument! They had it hot and heavy, and then ended the way women do, you know, by bursting out crying and bawling, and making up and each

one calling herself names for being so hateful to the other. If either William or I interferes to make peace, damned if they don't both of 'em light into us! They're really very fond of each other; Anne's about the only mother Francie's ever known. And they're both mighty good women, Burke — the salt of the earth, both of 'em. But they can't make up their minds to let each other alone, and each one think her own way about you. Every time your name's mentioned there's the same old row."

Nat listened amazed and rather troubled. He had supposed that Francie thought about him, as every one else; she had always been a submissive child, never disobeying and rarely even contradicting her elders. But she was also loyal and steadfast in her affection, as he knew; a little girl she had liked him, and it warmed his lonesome heart to think that she liked him still, or anyhow believed in him, in spite of everything, in defiance of everybody. He had seen her at a distance twice since his return; and once came face to face with her at the door of a shop, just as she was leaving with an armful of small bundles; the Ducey carriage, which was very splendid with polished surfaces, and shining, silver-plated chains and buckles, and a pair of champing black horses, stood at the curb. Francie dropped all her bundles with a start; her sweet little face turned quite gray. Nathan bowed soberly, and stooped down and picked up the packages and restored them to her — what else should he have done? "Th-thank you —" said Francie, in a fluttering voice, and, scarlet now, with trembling lips, she went across the sidewalk to where her aunt was sitting in the carriage, erect, forbidding, watchful. Mrs. Ducey took the things, fingering them fastidiously.

"What did that — that *person* say to you, Francie; tell me this minute!" Burke heard her ask sharply; indeed she raised her voice rather than lowered it for this somewhat personal remark, carefully looking around, over, through, and beyond the young man.

"He didn't say anything," stammered the girl, hesitating between them; and Burke, to relieve her, and perhaps also to hide his own loss of countenance, strode off. He would not have thought it possible for so trifling a thing to make him so angry. All the slights and petty

cruelties he had endured were as nothing beside the secure feminine insolence and brutality of Mrs. Ducey's voice and manner; he was down and she struck him — they all struck him. If their miserable weapons had been real slings and arrows, he was a man and could not revenge himself upon these weak creatures. "Francie would have spoken to me, if she had been by herself," he thought; "she couldn't have been contaminated by it. She used to like me. I wouldn't have taken advantage of her kindness or her inexperience; I wouldn't have presumed on it. I wouldn't even have let her say more than a how-d'ye-do for fear of giving some of these elderly cats some cause to gossip about her. They might give me credit for that much decency. Why, if I were as bad as they make out, they might know I still would respect a pure young girl like Francie." Sore and sick at heart was poor Nat; all the cynical philosophy he summoned up could not soothe him, and if virtue is its own reward, he found that a very poor and unsatisfactory one.

Hearing these words of old George's, however, a kind of shamefaced gratification rose within him. "It's a pity if they can't find something better worth while than me to quarrel over," he said, but I think there was a little false humility in that speech. Francie was his friend after all — she still liked him — the only woman who dared. He didn't count poor Mrs. Slaney; he had always been liked and somewhat feared and looked up to by chambermaids, laundresses, charwomen, the Mrs. Slaneys of all conditions and shades of rank. And to be sure there was Miss Vardaman; but she was, of course, influenced by Jack, and, too, she had reached an age when she might conduct herself as she thought proper and display a liking for any man she chose, without arousing comment, and — and — And, in short, if Francie had been forty-five, with crows' feet and a pinch under her chin, I doubt if Mr. Nat would have found it so peculiarly pleasing to be championed by her. There is a difference; the girl risked more, according to a woman's code; it took more character. For the idea of anybody making loose advances to a spinster of Miss Clara's type, or of her name being dragged into a scandalous association, was so fantastically ludicrous it might make even the women

laugh. Burke absently shuffled the papers on his desk; Francie must be about twenty-one — or twenty-two at most; she had a nice, round little figure — she had been rather dumpy and awkward at fifteen when she first put on long dresses — and a very pretty complexion, and dimples — he paused, recalling her dimples; heigh-ho! Burke himself was eight or nine years older and getting as gray as a badger, and was done forever with girls, women, the domesticities. And, in fact, he was doing nothing at all, sitting staring out of the window, when Lewis came in with the brief in the suit of Porter *vs.* Brinkerhoff for alleged defamation of character, and he turned with a sigh to the consideration of other people's troubles.

It was months after these episodes, and public opinion had been for some time undergoing the change and softening hinted at in the beginning of this chapter when, for a kind of climax to the process, Mr. Ducey came in, figuratively extending the olive-branch. William had got a shade fatter of late years, but his pallid complexion was unaltered, his hair as black, abundant, and abundantly oiled as ever, falling in the same rich abandon to his coat-collar; he was just as fond of fancy waistcoats, and looked as trim and as unostentatiously elegant as in the old days; and his manner showed the same gracious — and I am sure, kindly meant — patronage. No one would have supposed that times were at all changed with either of them, since the day Burke left the Ducey stable to serve under old George Marsh. For a flash Nat saw himself, a gawky hobbledehoy of seventeen or so, in his ill-fitting Sunday clothes, his squeaking boots, diffident, anxious, hopeful, mounting the office-stool; he had cut his initials with a jack-knife on its hollowing seat, which had acquired a mirrorlike polish, something akin to that which erelong decorated the corresponding surface of young Burke's pantaloons; he was only a boy, after all. He wondered if the initials were there still. He could smell again the hemp and coffee in the cellar; he had an instant vision of Mr. Marsh with the market-report on his knee, his eyebrows knotted over his dingy note-book and stub of pencil; of Mr. Ducey yawning furtively among his eternal memoranda. Now here was William delivering cordial and flattering commonplaces about his ex-clerk's achieve-

ments and abilities, about his office and his practice and everything that was his, exactly as if he had not deliberately ignored and cold-shouldered the young man for more than a year!

Business was dull, very dull, according to Mr. Ducey; it generally was so immediately after a presidential campaign year; and, in fact, during, and he might say, before a presidential campaign year. You had no sooner recovered from th — ah — the depression incident to one, than the next one — er — set in, as you might say. He thought it was getting worse and worse. He had thought it might be owing more or less, you understand *more* or *less*, to the present or the recent policy of the government, and to its future intentions. Now, for instance, this buying of all that territory in the southwest from Mexico, after we had overrun and practically taken it *vi et armis* — by force of arms, you understand. He was a believer in expansion, but he thought there were faults in the present — ah — system, as one might call it. If you looked at the government precisely as you would at a private citizen, — and there was no real reason why you shouldn't, no real reason, — you would be struck by the thought that with the government business, as with the private citizen's business, expansion could only be carried on by means of ready money. The buying of this New Mexican Territory proved that; it took fifteen millions. Unquestionably a great deal of ready money was necessary to carry on expansion. The result of that invariably was that you were cramped in some directions while you were expanding in others. The private individual — unless he was a very exceptional individual with a large capital in hand — had to give notes, and — ah — in the course of time he would inevitably have to meet those notes; and as these times came around, in view of the expenses of expansion, he would not improbably be short of money. "It works both ways, you see!" was Mr. Ducey's triumphant deduction from these arguments.

Burke waited for more, beginning, however to have a glimmering notion of where all this was leading. There was still a good way to go, for William was naturally fond of words, nor was he the only man of Burke's acquaintance who talked a great deal without saying anything. And if it is difficult

for many of us to set out a plain purpose in plain words, what does it become when the plan itself is slightly involved and by no means secure of a favorable hearing? Once, for a while, Burke shared an office with a couple of young fellows about his own age, brokers and real-estate agents; and during this association Nat had noted with interest the thousand-and-one ways in which men buy, sell, beg, bargain for, and, above all, borrow money. They ranged from the brisk youth who clerked in the other broker's office up the street, whirling in — "Hello! Good morning! Got any money?" Yes — and he began forthwith to recite terms and securities; no — and out he whirled again to seek some other dealer! They ranged from him, I say, through every imaginable style of person and proposition down at last to the man who needed desperately a loan which he knew he would never repay — knew it and knew that you suspected it. There is a specific look about him that cannot be mistaken — haven't we all seen him, amiable, nervous, deprecatory, jolly with a ghastly jollity, wretchedly and laboriously confident? He need not be a rogue; too often he is an old friend, banking, let us hope unconsciously, on that old friendship. Something of this look Nat thought he detected in his ancient employer. Mr. Marsh's unkind prophecies — which, however, to do the old man justice, I am certain he never repeated to any one else, or publicly where they might have done his nephew harm — recurred to Burke in connection with various vague rumors of the street. He waited patiently for the other to get to the point. "Ducey can't expect to borrow of me," he thought; "and he knows I don't conduct a loan business. What is he after?"

It was quite absurdly simple when it came out at last; William wanted Burke to get a loan for him out of Mr. Marsh — nothing could be easier for Burke, it appeared, nor, sad and strange to say, more difficult for Mr. Ducey himself. "I don't conceal from you, Nathan," he said — they had got as far as "Nathan" by this time in revived confidence and regard! — "I don't conceal from you, and I suppose for that matter you must have noticed yourself, that my wife's uncle feels, or, as you might say, entertains, a prejudice against me. It has increased or — er — augmented with his years, and of course he is now a very old man —

eighty-four, I believe — and is very infirm or feeble bodily — physically, and — ah — mentally. His mind, you know, is not what it was; he talks and repeats himself — says the same thing over and over, and, in short, has — ah — failed. Now, under these circumstances, I don't want to do anything that would appear to be taking advantage of him — that any one could construe as taking advantage of his age and weakness. I don't want to approach him, to — to — to approach him, in short, for this eight thousand dollars, although the sum is paltry — merely to overcome a temporary inconvenience — and he would be perfectly secured, and is in a better position to lend money than anybody I know of. Of course you know that is so; you know all about his affairs."

"You're mistaken, Mr. Ducey, I don't know anything about Mr. Marsh's affairs," said Burke. "He never has told me anything of importance about them."

Mr. Ducey looked politely surprised and incredulous. "Why, you don't tell me so, Nathan? I thought you managed his — er — his investments. I don't know why he doesn't employ you — a man of your known integrity and ability!"

"He employs another man of equally well-known integrity and ability, by the name of George Marsh," said Burke, with a laugh; "I doubt if he has ever considered any other agent."

"Well — er — ahem — he is a very rich man, at least you know that — everybody knows that. But in view of this dislike or prejudice he feels against me, I feel a — a hesitation — a reluctance to approaching him. He wouldn't listen to me — he hasn't any confidence in me, somehow," said William, with some bitterness. "But if *you* would put the matter before him — it's not really a loan, you know, Burke, it's an *investment* — I am sure the old gentleman would consider it. You — you might say five thousand, if you think you would be more likely to — ah — to succeed." He said a good deal more, advancing almost too many arguments in favor of this business transaction; and in reply to a suggestion of Burke's that he might apply to almost any well-to-do merchant in town instead of risking a refusal with harsh words from Mr. Marsh, entered into a very long and

confused explanation which did not explain — none of them ever do. He was under certain obligations to Mr. Marsh — Mr. Marsh should be entitled to — ah — to first choice, as one might say — in these hard times few men, even wealthy men, could spare — that is to say, would have so much cash lying idle — not that the sum was large, but — ah — Everybody knowing of the relationship would — ah — would think it strange that he should go outside the family for a loan — particularly when it was so safe and profitable; and that would produce a bad impression, would tend to destroy confidence, in short. There were so many reasons why William should "approach" Mr. Marsh that Burke finally began to suspect the real reason — that everybody else had already been "approached" in vain. He promised, in the end, to "speak to" old George, and with that Mr. Ducey had to be content. At any rate he appeared so, asked some urbane questions about Nathan's own prospects, gave him a kind message from Mrs. Ducey (!), vaguely invited him to "come up and take dinner with us one of these days," shook hands with extreme heartiness, and at last got himself out of the door — and almost into the arms of Mr. Marsh, slowly puffing up the stairs. It marred the exit somewhat.

"What'd Ducey want, Nathan?" said the old man, settling heavily into his accustomed chair, and reversing his cane to hook the cuspidor into easy reach; "huh? What'd he want, hey? What's he coming here for? Anne'll give him particular fits if he don't look out."

Burke told him, watching the hard, square, lined old face with a little humane anxiety, and obliged to acknowledge inwardly that the outlook was not hopeful. "I thought William would bust the business sooner or later," was Mr. Marsh's sympathetic comment. "He wouldn't pay any attention to me. Didn't I tell you that, Burke? Now he wants to borrow of me, huh? Well —" he looked around abstractedly, and, Lewis coming in at that moment, broke off to greet him genially: "How d'ye do, Archer? Howdy do, boys? I can't stay long this morning, just thought I'd drop in. I never did like to see a man loafing around a store or an office if he didn't have any *business* to attend to there; and I got to go home presently, anyhow, and see about

something." He never mentioned Mr. Ducey's proposition again; nor did Burke hear of it from the other.

In fact, anybody endowed with much less penetration than George Marsh, or even Mr. Nat Burke, might have known before long that DUCEY & Co. was in process of collapsing, like the children's balloons or other inflated toys I have seen, pricked and shrinking to flabby nothingness before one's eyes. It had been a flourishing concern five years ago; what had undermined it? Perhaps "expansion," perhaps, alas, too much confidence in his fellow-man on poor William's part. When at last that grim day came whereon the firm's failure was published abroad, and the receiver took the store in hand, and there was an auction-board and a pestilential red flag on the lawn, and the newspapers filled up their columns with the fruits of their tireless and enthusiastic research, what gold-mines, what wildcat banks, what rotten insurance companies, what swindling railroad schemes, what "Alexandria" and "Wellsburgh" lotteries figured in the tale! Burke, reading them, was reminded against his will of the gambler's cynical aphorism: "You can't skin an honest man." Were not these ingenious enterprises chiefly directed towards getting something for nothing? I declare that is no dishonest ambition with some men — certainly not with William Ducey. I see these visionaries as poets gone astray and dreaming of dollars instead of dactyls —grown-up boys still looking for Aladdin's lamp or the caves of Ali Baba.

Notwithstanding the dismal publicity of the failure and his own growing garrulity, Mr. Marsh did not discuss it at much length in the office. On Burke's remarking that it seemed unnecessary and a great pity for the Duceys to sacrifice their household furniture at auction, and that it could surely have been arranged otherwise, old George told him that Mrs. Anne had insisted on this measure.

"Anne's got her pride and her notions of honor and honesty, Nathan," he said, not without some feeling; "she's bound and determined they shall pay out all they've got to the last penny, and satisfy William's creditors as far as possible. I said to her: 'Why, Lord, 'twon't be more than four or five hundred dollars you'll get out of the bureaus and mattresses, and what's that? A mere drop in the bucket. Better keep 'em; you can set up your boarding-house with

'em.' That's what she's going to do, you know, keep boarders. She wouldn't hear of it. Poor Anne! I just made up my mind, then, Nat," said the old man, sinking his voice to a growling whisper, and looking sharply around to see that nobody overheard what appeared to him a confession of weakness; "I just made up my mind I'd buy in some of the things myself — the ordinary furniture, not the fancy stuff like that French clock or the china figgers on the parlor chimneypiece — she don't need *them* — and give 'em back to her, so's she'll have something to go on. Boarders have got to set on chairs and eat off tables, I guess. It's better than to give her the money — 'twon't cost so much, anyhow, and the things are good. If she had the money, she'd give it to William. I guess folks think it's kind of queer I don't help 'em, but, by damn, I done a lot of helping in times past. I used to help Walter, and I ain't going to begin that over again. They'll get my money — some of it, anyhow — when I die, and its pouring water through a sieve to begin giving it to 'em now. Anne's the only one of the whole caboodle that ever wanted to pay anybody back, or to help out by working herself."

"This is pretty hard on her. Doesn't she ever hear from George?" Burke asked.

"I believe she has once. I believe he wrote from Mobile or somewhere, and wanted money. She scraped around and sent him some. That's the last I know." He paused, chewing thoughtfully. "Say, Burke, did Ducey ever pay you what you spent for boarding George and taking care of him down there in Mexico City?"

"No," said Burke, and could not help smiling at the expression on the other's face.

"That ain't good business, Nathan," said old George, severely.

"Oh, Mr. Ducey knows. I sent him a memorandum. He forgot it, I guess; and you wouldn't want me to come on him now, would you?" Burke said, and laughed outright.

If it had not been for Mr. Marsh's announcement of his own plans, Nat would never have thought of going to the Ducey sale. Shrinking distaste possessed him at the notion of the crowd noisily invading the house where so lately no one would

have presumed to enter unasked, prowling about the poor, defenceless rooms — Mrs. Ducey's room, Francie's room — trying locked doors, exploring the attic and cellar, fumbling at the hangings, staring, criticising, comparing bargains, haw-hawing over the auctioneer's pleasantries. Verily, I think I should rather go to a funeral than witness such a profanation of a friend's home — a decent family mansion. Every such roof whereunder men have lived and suffered and been happy, has a soul; one might fancy its mirrors reflecting with loathing the strange faces, its curtains and carpets shuddering at the alien touch. Its very shabbinesses move one inexplicably, they speak so of old and dear association. There goes the big leather arm-chair out of poor Jones's sitting-room — the chair he used to sit and smoke and dream in; it is knocked down for three dollars — all it was worth, probably — to the stout, red-faced lady with the plaid shawl and the feathers in her bonnet; she was their laundress, I believe. The little walnut bureau with the long swinging glass and the drawers up one side was Mrs. Jones's; there is a discolored place on one of its marble tops where she got into the habit of laying the curling-iron down — the bureau won't fetch much, it's too worn. The small room just off of the bedroom? Why, that was the nursery; can't you see the gouges all along the baseboard where the points of her rocker hit when she sat in that low chair with a baby? And now from the garret they have brought down a whole wheelbarrow-load of broken toys, picture-books, building-blocks, a doll's cradle and trunk, the sight of which brings forth much laughter from the spectators; they bundle all the trash into one lot, and get rid of it to that elderly, side-whiskered gentleman who is the Superintendent of the Presbyterian Children's Hospital. I do not feel much like laughing, I! And I won't even bid on the mahogany chest and hat-rack, although I used to envy Jones the possession of them; let somebody who doesn't know the family have them. I should as lief have a mahogany ghost in the house as that relic, and wouldn't know how to look Jones in the face — broken-down failure that he is — if he should come into my hall and hang his hat on those pegs.

Mr. Burke was quite alone in this sentimental reluctance; everybody in the town, he soon found, was going to the Ducey

auction, some openly and brazenly, some more or less shamefacedly curious, some with the avowed intention of buying such and such a piece, some vaguely on the lookout for bargains. It was understood that a considerable part of the Ducey expenditures had gone into fittings and furnishings; everybody *hoped* they would realize *something*, but things generally go for a fourth of their value, you know. Jack Vardaman told Nathan he meant to buy one of the black carriage-horses, if they decided to break up the pair — he needed another horse for his buggy. "I said to Clara that if there was anything she wanted, any ornament, you know, I'd bid on it for her. They say everything in the house is to go, but she didn't seem to care for anything," he said; "are you going, Nathan?"

"I — I thought maybe I'd bid on some of the ornaments myself," Nat confessed, a little confused under the doctor's surprised look; "there's a French clock, and some mantel ornaments I've always admired," he explained, devoutly hoping he would be able to identify those articles when they were put up. Vardaman, although he was plainly confounded at discovering such tastes in the other, said nothing. They walked out to the house together.

It was a pleasant, bright May day; the place was already running over with people, who had tramped down the fresh grass a good deal, and defaced the flower beds, and broken branches off of the lilac and syringa bushes for bouquets; Nat noted the ravages with a sympathetic pang. The front part of the house was entirely open; only in the wing at the back there were some closed doors and shutters on the second floor where the family were staying, some one said. The stable was all turned out of doors, alow and aloft; the horses were being paraded for inspection; the vehicles, yes, that very shining, varnished, broadcloth-cushioned barouche whence Mrs. Ducey had bestowed so crushing a salute on him, Nathan now saw being run backwards and forwards, the wheels squinted at, the upholsterings prodded by dirty fingers. The stable had been enlarged since his day; his little room next the hayloft had disappeared. He sauntered to the tool-house, picked up an axe, and "hefted" it knowingly, testing the blade with his thumb. "Look out, mister," a working-man standing by warned him; "nobody hadn't

orter fool around them edge-tools that don't know nothin' 'bout handlin' 'em." Nathan put it down with a half-laugh, half-sigh. He went back into the house, meeting a good many acquaintances, all of whom remarked to him and to each other, "What! *You* here!" and presently found old Mr. Marsh vigilantly attending to his purchases.

"Just got the dining-room set — the chairs and table, that is — she can get along without the sideboard — for thirty-five dollars. Pretty good, Nathan, hey?" he reported. "They're solid wood, and cost Ducey a hundred and twenty-five, I know. Bookcases? No, I ain't going to bid on any bookcases," he broke off to announce decidedly, as one of the auctioneer's aides deferentially called his attention to the article next being offered. "No, I don't want 'em. But as soon as he comes to the coal-hods and fire-irons, let me know, will you? Mighty necessary, coal-hods and fire-irons." The neighboring competitors nudged each other grinning; doubtless they were speculating as to what on earth old George Marsh was here buying for.

In the front parlor — which, even under the present circumstances, was a much more splendid apartment than Burke remembered, with brocatelle and lace draping the windows, and a great display of tables, consoles, divans, gilt mirrors, and so on, now huddled into corners and piled up to make room — there were collected together on the top of the piano an army of vases, candelabra, and china figures, officered by two or three ornate clocks, which another obliging myrmidon volunteered to get the auctioneer to offer as soon as the furniture with which he was then engaged was disposed of. And Mr. Burke, becoming, after some spirited competition, the proprietor of about one-third of the assortment embracing a clock, two tall French vases or urns of a rather monumental or sepulchral aspect according to his own ideas, a Dresden youth in pink and yellow striped china tights playing a china guitar, and a corresponding young lady in china petticoats and a shockingly low bodice — Nat, I say, having acquired all these gimcracks, gave directions for them to be put aside with Mr. Marsh's goods.

"Oh my, you'd better not do that, sir," his ally, the auctioneer's page, objected; "you don't want to mix up clocks and bedsteads together. I'd better take 'em out to the

kitchen, where they won't get knocked around, hadn't I? There ain't anybody out there." Nat followed the good-natured lad to this place of safety, himself bearing one of the figures, to the openly expressed amusement of the crowd; and just as he was setting down his burden on the deal table, the door from the back entry and stairway opened, and in walked Francie Blake!

She gave an exclamation at sight of him, made a step back, hesitated, then came resolutely into the room, shutting the door behind her. Nobody witnessed this meeting, the kitchen being empty, and, I suppose, lacking attraction as compared with the parlor, where the sale was in full swing, and the crowd very thick. Burke was confusedly conscious of being glad they were alone, although this was hardly the place or time or way he would have planned to meet her.

"Na — Mr. Burke!" said Francie, helplessly.

"Why, I — er — how do you do?" stammered the gentleman, turning a fine red, desperately aware that this conventional greeting by no means explained his presence, but perfectly unable to think of anything else. "I — I wasn't expecting to see you," he added unnecessarily.

"I've been upstairs with Aunt Anne," said Francie, her wondering eyes travelling between him and the pink and yellow tights. "I came down to get her a glass of water. She doesn't want anybody to see her, but it's no difference if they see me. I didn't know you were here, either — at the sale, I mean."

Their eyes met in silence. They stood in the kitchen awkward and dumb, between them what memories, what lost years, what bitterness — on Burke's side, at least — of the misunderstood and misjudged! A petty tragedy encompassed them — the tragedy of this kind house; and neither of them could say a word. Ordinary forms seemed wholly inadequate to the occasion, yet ordinary forms were all they had to use. The very knowledge that this young girl had taken his part when every one she knew was against him filled Burke with a passion of gratitude and tender admiration; yet every convention forbade him to speak of it to her — even to let her know he knew of it. The girl recovered self-possession first, though changes of color slipped across her face in that charming fashion familiar with her.

"You've been bidding?" she said casually, glancing at the table again as she moved towards a shelf of crockery.

"Well, I — um — I thought I'd just put these things with the things Mr. Marsh is buying. I — I don't know much about them, of course, but I thought Mrs. Ducey might like to have — er —" Nat began to explain clumsily enough, when she interrupted him in frank surprise.

"The things *Mr. Marsh* is buying? What is Uncle George buying? We didn't suppose he'd come. Why, he surely can't be thinking of setting up housekeeping!" Francie dimpled with laughter in spite of herself. "Do you mean he got *those?*" she demanded, eying the china guitar with a new interest.

Nathan told her, grinning a little himself. "It didn't occur to me you mightn't know about it," he said; "I supposed old Geo — your uncle, I mean, would have said something to you — he might have found out what your aunt particularly valued, for instance —"

More dimples. "Gracious!" said Francie, with a kind of gleeful satire; "he'd never do that in the world. Think of the risk!"

"Yes, his idea appears to be to give Mrs. Ducey the bare necessities —"

"I'm sure it's very good of Uncle George, too. But what a beautiful time he must be having!" the girl said with a sober humor twinkling in her brown eyes; and they both laughed outright. I think they were a little unnerved by the suddenness of their meeting; but in truth old George, thrifty even in his benevolence, animatedly and happily engaged at the only pursuit, the only enjoyment of his whole long life, and one which he must sorely have missed of late, matching wits against the other bidders, saying among the trumpets Ha, ha! was a figure of quaint comedy even in this grave hour.

"Then *you* bought them — the clock and the vases, and the rest?" inquired Francie.

"Well, I thought it was pretty hard for Mrs. Ducey to go without her trifles — pretty things, the kind she's always been used to —" Burke said in some embarrassment; "the whole thing is so hard on her, anyhow. And so I — I —"

"And so you thought you'd give her some of them?"

Francie finished, looking first at the table and then at him, with a rather troubled smile this time. "I'm afraid she won't want to take them."

"She doesn't need to know anything about it," retorted Nat; "just let 'em go with the rest — with what your Uncle George buys in. It's not a matter of any importance. Mrs. Ducey was really not called upon to make these sacrifices. She might just as well give up her clothes and jewelry."

"Well, she *would* do it — and I suppose it *is* right, isn't it? The people ought to be paid, and Aunt Anne says it would be wicked for a man's wife to keep back anything. She wants to help all she can, she says. Only, Nathan, it seems to me, if you and everybody are going to buy the things and give them back to her, she's just where she was before —" She paused, surveying him doubtfully; she was not at all aware that she had called him by his name. Insensibly they had fallen into the old attitude of confidence. The estrangement, Burke's ostracism, the clackings of scandal, were forgotten; they were absorbed in the discussion of Mrs. Ducey's difficulties. And at Francie's last words Burke had to smile, noting how characteristic of her aunt was this generosity, this stubbornness, this self-sacrifice which achieved nothing but the making everybody else uncomfortable, this fanatic devotion to an unreasoned conception of duty. Perhaps Francie fathomed his thought, for her smile followed his.

"Aunt Anne is sure she is *right*," she said in a sort of affectionate apology.

"Well, she's doing all she knows how to help, anyway. She's going to take boarders, somebody told me."

"Yes. I don't know how we'll manage," said the girl, a little humorously dubious. "Aunt Anne's always having trouble with the servants, you know —" she stopped short with a gasp, and a rush of scarlet to the roots of her hair. I dare say the other colored up, too, for both must have been thinking of the same disastrous domestic experiment Mrs. Ducey had made. There was another instant of silence, when it seemed to Burke as if the hundred things he longed and could not find words to say hung almost palpable in the air — and then, with a gust of loud talk, half a dozen women from the auction burst into the room. Why should its two occupants have started guiltily, turning even redder than

before? They had not been standing very close together, and all the world might have heard the conversation. The people were entire strangers to both, as it happened, and wanted merely to take a look at the kitchen stove. Nathan was profoundly annoyed; he wished they could have kept out for another half-minute, anyhow. He might not see Francie this way again, for nobody knows how long — if ever! he thought dolefully. Here were these cackling busybodies running around, poking and prying and asking questions: "Do you know how these dampers work?" "Well, I'll bet that stove is ten years old, if it's a day!" "Shucks, Maria, you can cook on it just as well if the top lids is a leetle mite warped." "Say, young woman, are you th' hired girl? Goin' to stay with th' fam'ly? Th' lady's pretty hard to work fer, ain't she?" "How much you gittin'?" "I know a first-rate place —"

"I'll stay here, I think," said Francie, sending a glance of demure mischief in Burke's direction.

"I guess *I'd* better go," he said, part in impatience, part in unwilling amusement; some children had come galloping in on the heels of their elders, screaming and scuffling with rough and tumble play in the corners. Francie followed him to the door and out on the porch and put out her hand with so kind a look that Nathan, holding it close, was emboldened to add beseechingly: "I — I'll see you again some time — soon — can't I? You're going to speak to me after this, aren't you, Francie?"

She made an odd rejoinder, looking at him and quickly away again, with an expression quite indecipherable to his heavy masculine wits. "Oh, Nathan, you *are* so — so —" apparently the word eluded her; she could not say what he was, and went on headlong —"Of course I'm going to speak to you. I should have long before this if — if I'd had a chance. There!" and took her hand away, and hurried back into the house.

With this comfortable assurance Mr. Burke walked away, blessing the impulse upon which he had bought those gewgaws for Mrs. Ducey. He would have liked to go back and bid in the whole family of porcelain shepherds and shepherdesses if he could have been sure of repeating the last half-hour's experience. But had he really bought them for Mrs. Ducey?

CHAPTER XVII

Times change — and we change with Them

Certain cynics have pointed out with much unkind comment that when an erstwhile prosperous and successful man loses his money, no matter how blameless and amiable he may be, he is pretty sure to lose his friends along with it. The thing is sadly true, but not for the ignoble reasons they commonly assign; most of us have no hankering for anybody's fleshpots; all we ask is that every man, including ourselves, shall find his level. We feel as kindly towards the poor fellow as ever, but the fact is, not seeing him, we forget him. His name disappears from the club list; he cannot afford the old haunts and sports; he shares no longer in our business nor in our pleasure. It is nothing, abstractly, to you or me that whereas he once had ten thousand a year, he now cannot spend two, — we did not value him for that, — but practically it makes a difference too great for comfort in our ideas, our desires, our habits, our talk. It is natural that he should drift out of our lives; if, instead of having lost his ten thousand income, he had acquired a hundred thousand, the probability is he would have drifted out of our lives just the same — inevitably joining his hundred-thousand-dollar class; and, if we are sensible and humane persons, we should have borne him no grudge. Let the cynics snarl as they will, the brass pots have gone down in one stream and the earthenware in another since time began, and it is better that they should.

So, then, poor William Ducey, having joined that company of the unsuccessful for whom the world has so little room, was gradually lost to view. Nobody knew what he did, nor how he got along; a man past middle life with no particular ability, long in command of an office, and out of the habit of hard work, holding somewhat exalted ideas of his own worth and importance, it is not strange that he could get no regular

employment. His clerks, salesmen, accountants, the very janitor, for that matter, plain, honest fellows, found positions readily enough; but you could not suppose such duties or such salaries to be suitable for Mr. Ducey. For a while he had an office: "WM. DUCEY, COMMISSIONS, HAY, GRAIN, COTTON, COAL, ETC., WHOLESALE OR RETAIL, ALL ORDERS PROMPTLY ATTENDED TO," was advertised in the papers, and neatly printed cards with the same legend distributed among all our offices. The establishment was down a couple of steps into a basement, with a desk and stool, and a fly-blown calendar on the wall, and a square of white-and-blue checkered oil-cloth, that had come out of the entry of their old Third Street house, covering the floor; Burke remembered it when he went around one day to leave an order for a car-load of coal, and found the commission-merchant paring his nails in solitude over the empty ledger. The ink-well was dry as Sahara, with a dead moth in the bottom of it, when we attempted to make a note of the transaction; and I think there was an assortment of lottery advertisements and sheets of foolscap covered with calculations within the desk, as of old. Presently this place of business disappeared, too, in its turn. Mr. Ducey took a desk in various offices one after another, and went around soliciting life-insurance. At one time he had an agency for some kind of patent clothes-washer; "SLIFFY'S New Improved Circular-Motion Combined Washboard and Wringer used in Conjunction with SLIFFY'S Nonpareil Liquid Soap is destined to REVOLUTIONIZE the World of Labor!" William would buttonhole you on the street, he would bustle into your office in all the waning splendor of his waistcoats and cravats, and discourse on Sliffy by the half-hour with many suave and elaborate words. I don't know whether he ever sold any washers; Mr. Burke, not being what is called a "family-man," had no occasion for one himself. The next time he met his old employer the latter had a new agency — a new subject for his unfailing eloquence, "Aerated Root-Beer, a Substitute For Champagne, Impossible of Detection, Healthful, Stimulating, Non-Intoxicant, Especially Recommended to Those whose Principles forbid the Use of Liquor!" The firm of Burke and Lewis bought a quantity of this stuff, and the Lord knows it may be in the cellars under our old offices still! Even the boys wouldn't drink it. Before long Mr.

Ducey had some other indispensable commodity to promote, and we heard no more of the Prohibition tipple.

These successive ventures might be regarded as so many descending stages in William's effacement. Do you find them amusing, oh, brother Philistine? I have seldom seen anything more depressing. I think we were all glad and relieved when he came less and less, and finally not at all. He stayed about the house and went on errands and did the marketing, and took a nap summer afternoons on the porch with a newspaper over his head; and was very dignified at the head of the table in the black coat and black satin stock Mrs. Ducey kept in credit by constant darning, sponging, pressing — nobody knows what feminine arts. She would not have let him carry up coal or cut the grass even if he had wanted to; she liked to see him presiding amongst the boarders, affable, profuse in small talk, ready to take a joke or a cigar, keeping up a desperate fiction of the pleased host; and was as fond, as attentive, and devoted — if a shade more dictatorial and managing — as she had ever been in their young days of love and success. If we were not so used to it, we would see something heroic in the way a good woman will support and cocker up the man of her choice, and keep him not only comfortable and contented bodily, but secure in his own self-respect. She will take up the burden of making a living for them both, and with a gallant and smiling duplicity cozen him into believing he still carries it; she knows the gray mare is the better horse, but she never lets him suspect it, and she even closes her own eyes to it.

And here, I suppose, would have been an ideal opportunity to study the effect of adversity on different characters; but Burke, having other things on his mind, only remarked at the time, not without a certain satisfaction, that the gray mare *was* the better horse, as he suspected years ago when he was a boy in Mrs. Ducey's kitchen. I think Anne Ducey would have sooner taken a scrub-brush and pail and gone down on her knees to the Court-House floor than "solicit" people to buy trash, and accept their charity under a sounding name. Nothing in her life became her one-half so well as the spirit and resolution with which she met her troubles; she uttered no complaints, no regrets, no reproaches; she asked no favors and no sympathy; putting her shoulder to the wheel with the

best possible grace and always turning a brave face to the world. Everybody said Mrs. Ducey kept a good table, and the boarders were looked after so well that even they themselves noticed it! How much planning and worry and counting of pennies and physical labor it took, no mere man could guess. When Nathan saw either Mrs. Anne or Francie on his walks abroad, they seemed to his unintelligent view as dainty and well dressed as ever, though I have since been told that their frocks were turned, dyed, pieced, and made over a half-dozen times, and their bonnets were the work of their own hands. It was before the days of stenographers and Woman's Exchanges, and there was not much a gentlewoman could do to keep body and soul together. Miss Blake embroidered beautifully and worked on all kinds of fine linen and baby clothes, I remember hearing; and she also had a class of little girls in "Early English," as she told Nathan, meeting him one day, with a parcel of Lilliputian copy-books in her hands for the use of her small scholars.

"'Early English'?" repeated Burke, mystified.

"Certainly," and she began forthwith to chant with an unnatural gravity: "'Can Nat pat the cat? Yes, Nat can pat the cat. See Nat —'" when she had to stop for laughing. Pat the cat, forsooth! What Nat would have liked at that moment was to pat the girl; but as he could not do that in public on the street corner, and as, I dare say, Francie would have screamed for the police if he had offered to pat her in private, the young gentleman had to go without altogether. She should have been teaching her own babies and making their clothes, instead of wasting her life on other people's, he thought, looking after her as she tripped cheerfully away. About this time, people were beginning to remark how queer it was that Francie Blake didn't marry; all her set of girls were wives and mothers now, and she must have had offers. Francie was rather attractive, you know, although, of course, she was too tall, too short, too fat, too thin, too dark, too fair, — too something-or-other, in short, to come up to the standard of good looks. Yes, it was funny Francie hadn't married; but probably she wouldn't now, she would want to stay with her aunt, — she was a great help to Mrs. Ducey.

As Miss Blake was the soul of loyalty and truthfulness, and as Mr. Burke himself had tolerably stanch principles, it is

not to be supposed that, in fear of Mrs. Ducey's disapproval, they tried to keep her in ignorance of meetings such as the last, which occurred quite frequently on the streets and elsewhere. She knew all about it, and would listen, displeased but silent, when Francie or others mentioned it. Every one else had tacitly agreed to let bygones be bygones, and take Nathan back into social favor; as sometimes happens with those gentlemen who shave their heads, wear agreeably striped garments, and practise the lock-step and other healthful gymnastics in the retirement of our government homes, Burke's sentence had been partly remitted on account of good behavior; and he availed himself of, and was grateful for, the ticket of leave. But Mrs. Anne maintained towards him a species of armed truce; he could not visit the house, but he could take off his hat to her in public places, and she would respond with a chilly nod. She would say a civil how-do-you-do to him if they chanced to meet under a friend's roof, — for, after all, one must be considerate of one's host and the other guests, — but he was not to presume to talk to her. If Francie *chose*, knowing how her Aunt Anne felt, to stop and chat and be friendly and familiar with *that man*, she, Mrs. Ducey, was no *tyrant*, she always wanted to do and *tried* to do what was *right;* Francie was not a child any more, and if she would not profit by Mrs. Ducey's experience of *men* and the *world*, she would have to find out for herself. Mrs. Ducey was the last person on earth to *dictate* to anybody, or to hold any prejudices. Of course, as everybody was speaking to Mr. Burke now, and inviting him to their homes, *she* couldn't hold back entirely; that would be foolish; but she must *show*, nevertheless, that *she* could not altogether overlook, etc., etc. Thus Mrs. Anne, who, despite her confidence in her knowledge of *men* and the *world*, was about as wise on those subjects as a kitten, and narrow, obstinate, kind-hearted, impulsive, and illogical as only a good woman can be. Nathan subscribed to this wordless peace-pact with entire good humor, and kept his part of it scrupulously; it was not much more absurd than many of our other conventions, when all is said and done.

One might ask, and, in fact, not a few inquiring minds did try to find out, what Mr. Marsh was doing all this time while his niece and her family, his own flesh and blood, were having

so hard a struggle to keep their heads above water. The historian is obliged to answer, Nothing whatever. I do not know that, apart from his purchases of furniture, old George ever gave them a penny, or helped them out in any way. He seemed to think that he had done all that duty or affection required, or prudence allowed; and once, when Burke ventured to suggest that a regular allowance, no matter how small, might give poor Mrs. Ducey some feeling of freedom and security and be a moral support in her moments of discouragement and weariness, retorted very sharply that he didn't see that he was called upon to make any such provision.

"I'm perfectly capable of managing my own affairs and of deciding when and where and how and who I'm going to give to, sir," he remarked pointedly; "I don't need anybody to tell me. People think I'm so rich I can afford to support Ducey and the whole lot of 'em and never miss the money. Well, maybe I am — maybe I am; but it's never worried me any for folks to think me stingy. I've never lost a wink o' sleep over *that*, I guess. I never was much of a hand to meddle with other people's business," said the old man, fixing Burke with an accusing eye; "if Anne wants to keep William Ducey squatting around on his behind doing nothing while she works her head off, why, I say, let her do it! I haven't any call to interfere giving her money, so she can hand it over for him to spend. Where's her precious boy, for that matter? Why don't *he* pitch in, and help his mother a little? 'S far as I know, the most work George's ever done has been to write home for money. Well, he ain't going to get any of mine, not while I'm around to take care of it, anyhow!" He went away in a temper, growling to himself; but the next day came back to his favorite corner in the office, and seemed to have forgotten Burke's officiousness and the whole occurrence. Nat had to acknowledge privately that there was some force in the old gentleman's arguments, testy and unreasonable as he showed himself. Why give money for Anne's comfort which would inevitably find its way to the bottomless pocket of William Ducey? As for George, nobody ever heard a word from him.

Nobody ever heard from him direct, that is; nevertheless, we were not entirely without news. George was known to be somewhere in the South; and as Mrs. Ducey's relatives

on the mother's side were scattered thickly about that section of the country, from Virginia to Texas, had all visited her frequently and were well acquainted in our town, and were, moreover, like every Southern family, very strong on kinships and family feeling, items of information about George arrived at intervals from widely separated points, — but all to the same general effect, — and were received by the community with much shaking of heads, and that solemn satisfaction mingled with their real sympathy which is one of the few rewards of prophecy. It appeared that almost everybody, at one time or another, had remarked that George Ducey would not turn out well. Now everybody was vindicated! He had been met or seen at race-courses, gambling-houses, unholy localities of all kinds; he flourished in uncounted bar-rooms; the river captains knew him as well as Canada Charlie — was it for the same reasons? Sometimes he was very richly dressed, lavish and prosperous; sometimes at the limits of seediness and pawning his watch. In Savannah he stayed at the best hotel, drove a fine trotting horse, wore a tremendous diamond stud, and paid pronounced attention to Miss Willie Rhett — she was one of those Rhetts, you know, a daughter of Sibella Rhett, Sibella Lestrappe that was, kin to Cousin Horace Lestrappe at Baton Rouge. Departing from that neighborhood rather suddenly (it was said), he next was reported — after a long silence — at Vicksburg, exceedingly dismal and shabby and borrowing of Judge Claiborne — Ambrose Claiborne was a kind of cousin, having married Julie Desha, Stevenson Desha's first wife's child, etc. Once George disappeared from view for such a length of time that Mr. Marsh suggested, with a brutal humor, that somebody had better go down to the last city whence he had been heard from and bail him out!

"And I don't see why you're laughing. It's nothing to laugh at, sir!" the young person who communicated this to Burke rebuked him with great spirit and indignation; "if you could see poor Aunt Anne!"

"How do you know I'm laughing? It's too dark for you to see my face," said the other (he had been grinning a little, though!); "anyhow, that wouldn't keep me from feeling very sorry for Mrs. Ducey."

"Well, you *were* laughing just the same. And oh, Nathan,

it's pitiful. Her only son, her only *child!* And she keeps thinking up excuses for him all the time. When Cousin Eliza Breckinridge wrote that about her Jimmie seeing George lose so much money at that card game — what do you call it? faro? — in some dreadful disreputable place where they played — in Nashville, I think — why, Aunt Anne just said, *'H'm! And what was Jimmie Breckinridge doing there?'* It was really a little funny, because nobody could say a word — and poor Cousin Eliza thinks Jimmie's a perfect saint. I sometimes feel as if it was better for Aunt Anne to hear even stories like that about George than not to hear at all, the way it's been lately. It's six months, at least. The worst of it is, I can't pretend to think George is — is all right, you know."

"Why, would that make any difference to Mrs. Ducey? Does it hurt her feelings?"

"Mercy, of course it does!" said Francie, in surprise; "she wants everybody to think about him the way she does. And I know it's horrid, but I can't — I *can't* make believe to like him. I ought to, but it's just that I *can't!*"

"You speak as if it were a very wrong and distressing thing not to be able to 'make believe," Burke said, and laughed; "is that so necessary?"

"I don't know. I never thought about it before. I suppose we *do* make believe a lot of the time — women do, I mean. We have to, you know," said the girl, thoughtfully.

"*Have* to? Why?"

She only laughed a little, and repeated, "Why, we just have to, you know," and immediately began to speak of other things — how hot it was for so early in June, and weren't the stars lovely and clear to-night? And she did hope there wouldn't be a crowd at the church, but she believed everybody in town was going. This preacher was said to be a perfectly wonderfully eloquent man, and had Nathan ever heard of such a thing as *revival meetings* before?

He had not, nor had any one else in those days. The religious enthusiast, belonging to no denomination, preaching in any church, or, failing that, in any theatre, on any street corner, fervent, florid, emotional, working his hearers and himself to strange ecstacies of belief and repentance and

exalted resolve — this was a new figure among us. He was, I suppose, a sort of ancestor of the present-day Salvation Army worker; his rough-hewn creed suited all men; his own honesty and sincerity could not be doubted, spite of his extraordinary claptrap methods. Without question there are many of all classes who must cry — yowl, bawl, out of the depths, at the top of their lungs, who come before the Lord with rejoicings fit to deafen the universe, who cannot be sure of their faith and hope without making a prodigious stir about it; even in this sophisticated day, our neighbor is constantly "getting religion" and being, for a while at any rate, let us hope, bettered by the process. And that warm June evening, when Miss Blake and Mr. Burke — having met by the purest accident, of course, at the corner just below the Ducey house, where the gentleman happened to be strolling about after tea — when these two young people walked up to Zion Chapel, on Town Street, to hear the revivalist preacher that everybody was making such a fuss over, they fell in with a number of other pilgrims, and heard some remarkable tales of conversions and changes of heart. The Reverend Mr. Badger drew enormous crowds, not one of whom knew why he went; it was hot — there was nothing else to do — curiosity — idleness — desire for some sort of excitement, — every one had an excuse. Nat Burke went because Francie chose to go, and for no other earthly reason; he was not given to pious exercises, particularly of such a noisy and vehement kind. It is more than thirty-five years, and Mr. Burke has never been to another revival meeting; this was his first and last. But that is not the reason why he remembers it so well.

Zion Chapel, when they reached it, was tightly packed with very warm, fanning people; and they would have been glad to find seats in some quiet corner whence escape would be easy in case the conversions were effected with too much vigor. "People get to crying and going on like everything, somebody was telling me," said Francie, whispering — quite unnecessarily, for every one was talking freely without regard to the sacred character of the building and occasion; to approach the Deity with a certain informality appeared to be part of the Reverend Badger's method. They recognized many acquaintances in the crowd; and, unluckily, some one

who was officiating as volunteer usher, catching sight of Burke, came bustling and insisted on dragging them to a prominent seat in the front, from which they "could see everything," as he heartily assured them.

"We don't care about seeing everything," said Nathan, annoyed — the more so, perhaps, as there had been some nodding and nudging at sight of Miss Blake in his company, and he saw the ready color deepening in her cheeks; "we may not want to stay for all the — the exercises, you know — "

It was to no avail; down they had to sit, with the feeling that two hundred pairs of eyes were fastened on their backs; and, to make matters worse, Mrs. Ducey herself came in a few minutes later, and, being escorted to another conspicuous position not far off, passed them with the slightest possible salutation to Burke, and a look of icy surprise at Francie's choice of companion. I don't know why both the young people should have felt guilty and conscience-stricken, and wished they were anywhere but in this house of God. You would have thought that the congregation was gathered together for another purpose than to observe their behavior; and, indeed, it is very likely they attracted less attention than they supposed.

"I used to know a man named Badger once," said Nat, trying awkwardly to ease the situation; "it's rather an uncommon name. But he wasn't a preacher — anything but!" the young man smiled at the recollection; "he was an actor."

"Oh, *was* he?" said Francie, a little exaggerating her interest; "this one wasn't always a preacher, either, they say. He got converted. He tells about it himself. He was leading an awful life, I believe he says. Maybe it's the same man!"

"Oh, hardly," Burke said tolerantly; "the Badger I knew was no such sinner. He was a very good sort of fellow."

"But an *actor*, you know — "

"Well, of course he lived in a hand-to-mouth, harum-scarum way. But there wasn't anything wrong with him. Is that the melodeon? Is that a hymn they're beginning?"

"Yes, it's 'Sinners, turn! Why will ye die?' — don't you know it? We ought to stand up — at least they would

in our church," Francie says, looking around with the faint, unconscious superiority of a good Episcopalian. And presently we do stand up, all of us; the chorus bursts out, its great sound moving and uplifting even to Burke, who did not know the words, and could no more sing than an owl. But he liked to hear Francie's clear soprano, sweet and weak, no matter what the tune — they all seemed much alike to him. "Sinners, turn! . . . " Nathan, directing his eyes towards the — the stage, I had almost called it! — the elevated dais, whereon were arranged a desk and chair and tumbler of drinking water, according to the plain tastes of the Zion Chapel-ites, beheld with a start that tall, lank, dramatically monastic figure, arrayed in a flowing black coat, and incredibly solemn black trousers, stalking across to the desk, standing there with folded arms, in the best of *Hamlet* styles, surveying his audience with a mystic gaze, melancholy, rapt, remote! The very fact that Badger's name had been so recently on his tongue only added to Burke's astonishment; he was too astonished to be amused. Even the instant picture of Badger as last seen, his face masked with chalk and daubs of red paint, clad in a night-gown-like garment, gambolling merrily about the sawdust ring on a spotted wooden hobby-horse in grotesque parody of the World-renowned Bounding Jockey whose Feats have delighted the Crowned Heads of Europe, Ladies and Gentlemen — even that contrast suggested nothing comic. And after all, thought Burke, recovering a little, it was four or five years since, a time long enough to work many radical changes — of heart, as of everything else. He gave the actor credit for entire sincerity; Badger was an honest man — a very simple, confiding, enthusiastic fellow. If he was not exactly the stuff of martyrs, and would probably have quailed before the cannibal kettle, he was none the less a thorough and purposeful convert, as his whole words and manner testified when he began his address. And if it was plainly agreeable to him to hold, for once, undisputed, the centre of the stage, he was not the first performer to fancy himself greatly in this particular line.

In truth, Mr. Badger's stage experience — upon which he touched with sombre regret and warning — had fitted him admirably for this kind of public speaking, where a great,

resonant voice, trained to distinctness and emphatic expression, a certain freedom, sweep, and accuracy of gesture, and some handy acquaintance with the classic dramas were unusual enough and not to be despised. As the oration progressed, from the sobs and sniffs and exclamations and movement here and there amongst the benches, Nathan perceived that the time-honored devices of melodrama were taking effect — have they not always been ten times as successful as the closest-reasoned argument? Badger chose for his text the story of the Prodigal Son, which he read from the Bible with infinite niceties of elocution. He himself had known (he said) a youth who might have been its hero; they had met (alas, my friends!) amid the profane pleasures of the camp at Matamoros — the camp of the American army during the late struggle. And here the speaker drew a vivid picture of the vicious delights of that residence, which caused one of his hearers to smile a little covertly. The marble halls of the Spaniard, his gilded churches, monuments of intolerance and iniquity, the riotous feasting, the luscious wines, the seductions of Mexican beauty — Burke was amazed to find what he had lived with and escaped; most people would have thought Matamoros a sickly, dirty, comfortless hole where vice might be as rank as Badger described it, but certainly not so alluring. Marble halls, indeed! Nat recalled the "Grand Spanish Saloon" with an inward laugh. He must get hold of Badger and ask him about the Jeffersons, he thought.

". . . And when do we *next* see this young man George, my friends?" inquired the orator, pursuing his narrative in a voice sunk to the note supposed to represent horror dashed with pity, and gazing ominously all about. "Where do we now see young George?" says Badger, a little louder, and recoiling a step; "where do we find —" and at this instant, his eye, roaming dramatically over the faces nearest him, lit on Burke, and recognized him at once! "Where do we — um — ah — Shall I TELL you, my friends?" said Badger, momentarily taken aback and stammering; then he swept on. We saw George at the GAMING-TABLE! We saw the heaps of GOLD — a word which the convert contrived to enunciate with a terrified relish, as if he at once felt and feared its deadly attractions — the

players' clutching fingers and greedy eyes; we witnessed the losers' mad despair, and the winners' madder orgies. It was as good as a novel any day, having Badger tell us about George! This unfortunate young person was now in full career on the downward path; I forget what happened to him at the GAMING-TABLE — win or lose, the effect was equally deleterious, as our preacher was careful to make plain; but, at the last, after many such experiences, his morals being by now thoroughly undermined, George, *reeling* to his quarters at a disreputable hour in the morning, haggard, bloodshot, and penniless, — we had an awful picture of his appearance, — committed the final act which should have plunged him, irredeemably, into the outer darkness. "Dishonored and depraved, weakened and corrupted, he forgot not alone his duty to his family and himself, not alone the principles in which he had been trained, not alone," — half a dozen other things, — "but even that feeling which is at once the simplest and most sacred of the human bosom — the LOVE OF COUNTRY!" Badger announced thunderously in the biggest capitals. "False to his word, false to the land of his birth, false to the power that under Heaven had protected his infancy, he DESERTED. . . . Yes, my friends, and he did more. He took the money of his comrade, the man to whom he owed a thousand kindnesses, his more than brother, the friend that lay sleeping trustfully by his side, he stole that friend's pay and DESERTED. . . ." And what else George did at this particular juncture Burke missed, for he had that instant recognized with a shock of surprise and apprehension what mutual acquaintance of his and Badger's was masquerading, as it were, under all this fustian. He gave so violent a start that Francie noticed it, and looked at him, wonderingly. Nat reddened under her eyes in his confusion. It was quite half a minute before he remembered that neither Mrs. Ducey nor anybody else in the assembly could possibly know of whom the preacher was talking, and began to breathe more freely. There sat Mrs. Ducey, almost within reach, unconcerned, her whole attention fastened on the speaker, a good deal excited by his oratorical arts. And when Badger finally brought George through devious ways to a beautiful and edifying death-bed repentance, Anne, like the rest, among whom Badger himself

was not the least moved, was weeping openly into her pocket-handkerchief. I believe a good many "went forward," if that is the proper phrase, and were converted in due ceremony that evening. It was very late before we got away.

(After this evening I never saw Badger again. He called at the office next day, when I happened to be out, and went away leaving a note with many expressions of regret and earnest wishes for my spiritual health and well-being. He continued his evangelical career for some years, settling down at last in Chicago, where he had a "Temple" or "Tabernacle," to which all creeds were welcomed; and died there in '72 of a lung trouble brought on by cold and exposure during his pastoral labors at the time of the great fire. — GENERAL BURKE'S NOTE.)

CHAPTER XVIII

In which we hear Various News

"What made you jump that way?" Francie asked, as they waited between the seats for the crowd to thin out. It was a long business, further retarded by everybody stopping for a moment's chat with everybody else; there had been chairs placed in all the aisles, and the attendants were trying to clear them away with a great rattling and banging, handing them about over people's heads. Two or three of the elders or other eminent members of the church were consulting together on the platform; the converts had somehow disappeared; a surprising air of business and bustle replaced the late hysterical elevation; and Burke overheard two ladies, whose eyes were quite red from recent emotion, earnestly exchanging views on the best methods of putting up spiced cherries, as they edged their way past him.

"Why did you give such a jump right there a little before the end?" repeated Francie.

"Did I jump? I — I just happened to think of something."

She gave him a sharp look, and then suddenly and most irrelevantly inquired, "Is that the Mr. Badger you used to know?"

"Yes, it's the same man."

"Oh, it was at Matamoros you knew him, then?"

"Yes."

"Don't you want to stop and speak to him?" suggested the girl; "I can go on home with Aunt Anne —"

"Oh, I can see Badger any time," said Burke, to whom this arrangement did not especially appeal. "The revival meetings are going to keep on for a week, aren't they? We were good friends in his actor days, you know, but maybe now he's a minister he won't be so glad to meet me again —"

Before he could add any more excuses, Mrs. Ducey came up with her face of calm and ladylike disapproval. She had been talking to some one; there were little knots of friends standing by; and the reverend gentleman, his labors apparently over for the day, now issued forth from some retiring room and joined the elders at the foot of the platform steps with affable discourse.

"You will come with *me* now, Francie. It's time we were going home," said Mrs. Anne, overlooking Burke this time completely. The young man dropped back embarrassed; but Francie held out her hand to him in spite of a dagger glance from her aunt. "Good night, Mr. Burke," she said clearly and resolutely; and at the sound of the name Badger turned around.

I think he hesitated for one second. The color came brightly into his face, which had got to looking rather thin, pale, and ascetic in accordance with this new rôle the honest fellow was playing. Perhaps the hobby-horse and Pantaloon costume flashed into his mind. But it was only for a second, and then he came running over eagerly, and seized Burke's hand with genuine warmth, forgetting all his innocent theatrical tricks. People standing near looked on interested.

"Captain Burke — it *is* Captain Burke? I thought I couldn't be mistaken. I saw you when I was speaking. Don't you remember me — Badger? Ed Badger? I'm a good deal changed — at least I hope I am — but don't you remember me?"

"Indeed, I remember you very well. You were mighty kind to me when I was sick at Matamoros," said the other, heartily. Badger made a gesture of denial.

"That was before I had seen the Light," he said with a great deal of simplicity and conviction; "I'm a different man now, Captain. You'd find me different. Some of these kind friends were here the other night when I told them about it. It's an awful thought to me now that for thirty years of my life I was a servant of sin. But I'm not too late — I'm not too late to save my own soul and help save my neighbor's, I trust, if the strength is given me," said Badger, solemnly. There was no hint of cant about him. I am sure he must always have been no more nor less of a sinner than the most of us — an average man. There was something a

little touching and also a little foolish in his sad self-abasement; and I am afraid he was not nearly so interesting and likable to Burke as in the gay, haphazard days of his unregeneracy — so perverted are our tastes. Nat would have liked to hear some news of Mrs. Jefferson and Joe, but found his questions inappropriate to this style of conversation, and we might all have begun to feel a certain awkwardness if somebody had not intervened to present Mrs. Ducey and Miss Blake.

"Mrs. Drake — Miss — ah — Lewis —" said Badger, missing the names, but making a brave stagger at them, in the surrounding noise; he shook their hands with immense warmth, however — ministerial cordiality copied from some noted evangelist. With all his sincere conviction he was as conscious of his pose as ever he could have been in his stage days, and played the part with an equal care. It was a strange thing to see in this scatter-brained fellow who naturally, as Burke knew, kept so light a rein on his thoughts and speech. Mrs. Ducey beginning to make some enthusiastic comment on the sermon, he interrupted her gently: "Oh, no, don't say that, Madame. A man who hasn't any training can't do much as a speaker. I am no orator as Bru — that is, I mean, all I can do is to speak right out from my heart. As Saint Paul says, 'I come not with excellency of speech or of wisdom.' I find the best I can do to bring people to God is just to tell my own experience, something of what I've *seen* and *known* and *felt* myself. It's — it's the kind of example, you know, that's sometimes far better than precept. If every sinner had somebody to say to him, 'Look, brother, this is what you're doing —' 'Sister, this is where you're going —'"

"Like that poor young man you were telling us about this evening," said Mrs. Ducey, sympathetically; "I suppose if in the beginning he could have seen what he was coming to, none of it would have happened."

"Why, was it *all* true? I thought, part of the time, it was just what *might* have happened, you know — I mean I didn't understand that you had — had *seen* every bit of it," said Francie, innocently. Her aunt looked in horror at this questioning of the reverend word; but Badger, a little discountenanced, hastily explained that while the main facts

were true, he had used what he called "— um — er — poetical or rhetorical license to — to make the moral stronger. To bring out the lesson, you understand. I — in point of fact, I don't know how the young man ended," he acknowledged in some confusion; "I hope and trust he repented. I never saw him after he deserted."

"Oh, he didn't die, then?" Mrs. Ducey asked, distinctly disappointed.

"Well — er — no. At one time I heard that he was taken and hanged by our troops for deserting, but that report was afterwards contradicted —"

"Hanged! How awful!"

"'The wages of Sin is Death,' Madame," said Badger, solemnly. "Only," he added with some embarrassment, "I was about to say that I understood quite authoritatively that Ducey wasn't hanged after all. Did you know anything about that, Burke? Somebody told me you got him off — got him pardoned, I mean, you know," he explained to the ladies; "how was that, anyhow?"

"Wh-what?" stammered the other, off his guard, and totally unprepared for this turn. Enough has been said throughout this history to show that in such an emergency Mr. Burke was anything but quick or ready. "Hey? Er — what — um —?" said he, aghast.

"Why, you knew him? — you knew all along who I was talking about, didn't you?" said Badger. He flushed up, glancing from one to another, evidently thinking he was being doubted. That he ought never to have mentioned the names of his "examples" in this or any other public company did not once seem to occur to him. "Of course you remember Ducey — *George Ducey*, you know. I'm sure Burke ought to remember him," he added to the others; "it was his money the poor misguided young man took. As I was saying, all the main incidents of the story are true, Mrs. Drake, and were well known at the time. It has always struck me as a particularly instructive example of the gradual decay of principle when not governed by Christian — ah — by Christianity, in short —"

He kept on talking in his distinct, carrying voice, unconscious of the sudden, blank silence that had fallen on us; he was used to being heard silently; at least a dozen people

were within hearing, listening alertly, with curious looks divided between Mrs. Ducey and Burke himself, who, feeling, somehow, as if all this were his fault, looked more guilty and wretched probably than George Ducey ever felt. To-morrow the story would be all over the town, with who knows how many embellishments — as if the poor mother didn't have enough to bear with George already and her other troubles! Nat even caught a sly smile here and there; his blood quickened with anger at the sight. He went up to Mrs. Ducey and offered her his arm; she took and clung to it; all the color had gone trembling out of her face; she looked an old woman. "Take me home, please," was all she said, and Burke got her out by one of the side doors into the fresh air and kind darkness. They had gone perhaps half a square when Francie came hurrying lightly after and caught up with them, out of breath, but with a kind of composure and resolution in her firm young step.

"What did you say?" her aunt asked abruptly, in a harsh voice.

"It's all right. I told them it was the heat, and you were dreadfully tired before you came," said Francie, reassuringly; "Mr. Badger doesn't know anything. I made it all right, Aunt Anne. Don't worry." And this cheap device, which could have deceived nobody, seemed to satisfy and tranquillize both women! Mrs. Ducey spoke once again during this walk.

"Is it true?" she asked the young man harshly and abruptly as before.

"It is true," said Burke.

They got back to the house somehow, after a walk which seemed to Burke interminable, like the pointless journeyings of a dream. The lights were out and most of the porches deserted as they came along; and I suppose all the boarders had gone to bed, too, the place was so silent. It was the new house to which they had moved after the catastrophe in William's business; Burke had never set foot within it before. "Ring the bell; Mr. Ducey must be up — he'll let us in — he ought to be told — ring the bell," said Anne, in a kind of hysterical impatience.

Burke obeyed her; but after an untold amount of bell-ringing, it was not William who came downstairs and opened

to us, but one of the boarders, a young fellow whom Nat knew, a clerk in one of the shops — we heard him making profane remarks in an undertone as he sought for matches to light the hall lamp. And being lightly attired in a shirt and trousers, he skipped upstairs in a panic before Francie's petticoats in the doorway.

"Mr. Henderson — isn't that Mr. Henderson?" the lady of the house called after him. "Where's Mr. Ducey? Will you knock on the bedroom door and tell him to come down, please? Tell him I want him."

"He ain't in," said the youth, modestly retiring behind the bannisters in the upper hall; "somebody came for him, and he went out after you went away, and he hasn't got back yet."

"Went out? Do you know where he went?"

"No. Up to the revival, I guess, though. I heard 'em say something about it." He vanished.

"I — I wanted William to be here — I wanted him to know," said Mrs. Ducey, feverishly. "He ought to know right away. You ought to tell him yourself."

"Why, what should I tell him?" said Burke. "There is nothing for me to tell —"

"He ought to know about — about George. If it's all true what that man said about him — about his taking your pay, and all. You ought to have told us before. I don't see why you didn't tell us. Of course George just took your money with the intention of *borrowing* it, Mr. Burke. He never in the wide world would have — have taken it any other way. He must have forgotten to tell you about it afterwards. He's nothing but a young boy, and — and his character's not formed yet — you couldn't expect him to know anything about business obligations — he hasn't had any training or experience. But you ought to have told us, and Mr. Ducey would have seen that you were paid back, of course."

"There's one thing you can't ever pay him back, though," interrupted Francie, with a heightened color, and speaking in a hard little way, entirely foreign to Burke's knowledge of her; "that's for keeping George from being hung — the man that stole from him and told shameful stories about him — stories that *you* believed. Nathan saved his life,

and never let anybody know a thing about it. And you thought you were too good to speak to him. You ought to go down on your knees and ask him to forgive you!"

"Francie!" cried her aunt. "How dare you speak to me like that? How dare you?"

"It's the truth, and you know it," said the girl, savagely; "George never told the truth in his life, and you know that, too! How do you feel about it now? You've gone and scattered his mean lies all over everywhere —"

"Oh, hush! Francie, hush!" said Burke, sickened at the violence of these two naturally gentle creatures, shamed to the soul to behold them quarrelling over him; "it's all over and done with. Let it be. Calling George names can't do me any good. You may say I saved George's life if you choose to put it that way. All I did was to go to General Scott, and try to get him to let the boy off — that's everything I did. Any man that knew George would have done that much in sheer humanity — Jim Sharpless would have done it, if I hadn't been there. It's nothing to make a rumpus about —"

"You took care of him afterwards in Mexico City. Much thanks you got for that!" said Francie, bitterly. Tears sprang into her eyes. "They're unjust to you, Nathan; they're mean and unjust, everybody is. They — they haven't any *sense*. And you j-just t-take it all, and never *do* a th-thing!" she sobbed. There was something as maternal in her anger and distress over him as in Mrs. Ducey's over George.

"I'm sure I have always tried to do right and be just," said Anne, trembling. "It's not my fault if I didn't know about some things. I couldn't know unless somebody told me, and nobody did. I couldn't help that. I'm very grateful to you, Mr. Burke, for all you did for my son, now that I *know* about it. I don't think it was quite fair to us, though, to keep us in ignorance all this time. I think it was your duty to tell us. And he was *paid* for all George's bills in Mexico City, Francie, because I sent the money myself. I sent it to George to give you —"

"Oh, sent it to *George!*" said Francie, with scorn; "I don't believe Nathan ever saw a cent of it. Did you?"

"Why, I — I — "

"That's enough," the girl said dryly; "*you* never could tell stories, Nathan; it's no use your trying."

Mrs. Ducey looked at him, and did not challenge this judgment. "I never owed anybody a penny in my life that I didn't try to pay," said the poor woman. She dropped into a chair and put up her shaking hands to her face. They used to be pretty little hands, and it gave Burke a pang to see them now calloused and discolored by the work of these last hard years. "I always pay when I can — I've tried so hard. How much was it, Nathan? A captain's pay is forty dollars a month, isn't it? And how much was the other — the rest? I haven't the money, you know, but you — you might come and b-board it out," said poor Mrs. Ducey, with sobs.

If the young man had been a Shylock, she could have made no more abject an appeal. It was pitiful, it was grotesque, it was exasperating. Nathan could hardly comprehend what all this tragic feminine fuss was about; their distress of mind touched him unutterably, but it appeared perfectly unreasonable. He wished from his heart William Ducey would come; then, at least, they could talk about it, man to man, if the family were so determined on talking, and get at some sort of understanding. It was, of course, very hard for Mrs. Ducey to learn these additional unpalatable facts about her son; but if he, Burke, had chosen to overlook George's obliquities towards himself all these years, why should *they* take up the question now? He wanted nothing so much as to leave it all dead and buried, but they *would* resurrect it in spite of him! They ought to accept George for the worthless thing he was, as Burke and everybody else had accepted him long ago. Why shoulder his obligations? Why worry about him at all? Yet, of course, it was natural — it must be natural — *somebody* had to look out for George, he caught himself thinking. In the whole of his own hard-working and, I hope, honest life nobody had ever looked out for Nat Burke, and nobody ever would — but somebody must look out for George! Somebody — unthanked and unrewarded — is always looking out for all the weak-kneed; and such is the eternal responsibility of the strong we forget that, if eternal, it is also wholly irrational.

"Why, I don't want your money, Mrs. Ducey," he said at last, looking down at her, perplexed and infinitely sorry.

"I did very little, only what was natural and what anybody else would have done for George; and I didn't do it for pay. As to what he owed me, the poor boy was most kind about nursing me when I was sick, and didn't do it with any idea of pay, either, I am sure. So can't we call the score even? Let's have no more talk about it. You believe, and you have every right to believe, certain stories about me, and you don't want me in your house — as a boarder or any other way. Very well; let it be so. Nobody on earth could think it your duty to make such a sacrifice, and I wouldn't accept it, anyhow. I don't see that what you have just heard need make any difference in our relations. If I had saved George's life a dozen times over, I should still be the same Nathan Burke, whose own life you think to have been so corrupt that you hesitate to speak to him. Amen. Let us each go our way as we did before, and forget this," concluded Burke, looking about for his hat, and a little abashed, all at once, to notice what a lengthy oration he had been delivering.

Mrs. Ducey wiped her eyes with a fierce movement. "No, you shan't go — you shan't go out of this house till you've been paid," she said with so much of her old headlong obstinacy that Nathan could scarcely keep back his smile. "I've always done *right*, as far as I knew," said Anne, vindictively; "here — take this — it'll pay you and more, I know, because it cost a great deal when William gave it to me," she resolutely gulped back a sob. "Take it — take it —!" She detached some small object from the collar of her gown, and held it out to the bewildered young man with a vehement gesture — thrust it into his face, in fact.

Francie cried out: "Oh, *don't*, Aunt Anne — please don't! Nathan is — he isn't — oh, don't you *know* — can't you *understand* —" her voice shattered into sobs; she shrank up against the wall in shame and distress.

"What is it? What do you want me to do with this?" said Burke, helplessly, and took the thing — it was a piece of jewelry, as he now saw — from Mrs. Ducey's hand mechanically, and stood between them, holding it, with a questioning look.

"It's my opal pin — my pin with the diamonds around it,

Nathan," said Mrs. Ducey, tremulously. "Don't you remember it? It's real, you know. I — I don't know how much it's worth, but —"

Burke stared at it; he remembered it well. "How do you happen to have it?" he asked in a strange voice.

"I couldn't give it up — I just *couldn't* — at the sale, you know. I thought I might keep that much, anyhow. It's my very own — I didn't *have* to give up my own things," said Mrs. Ducey, on the verge of more tears. "Anyway, I'm glad I kept it now. I'd rather pay you than anybody."

"But I thought this had been stolen. Isn't this the pin you said Nance stole?" said Nat, slowly.

At the sound of that unlucky name, there was a startled pause; Anne looked in alarm as if she thought Burke might proceed to some indecent discourse. And then Francie said hurriedly: "Nathan, it was never stolen at all. It had slipped down somehow behind the mantelpiece, and we found it when the men were fixing the new mantel — when Aunt Anne had that room done over. There was a big crack behind the old one — they had to plaster it up. It was while you were away — five years ago. While you were in Mexico."

After another silence, Burke said, "I don't want this, Mrs. Ducey," and laid it on the table beside her.

She looked at him in a sort of uncomprehending and baffled vexation. "Oh, mercy, what *do* you want, then?" she ejaculated impatiently, forgetting that she had been repeatedly assured he wanted nothing whatever. "It's enough to try the patience of Job! I suppose you won't take the pin because of — because of Nance Darnell. Of course she didn't steal it — I was mistaken about that. I've never had a chance to talk to you since we found it, or I'd have told you. I'm always ready to acknowledge when I've made a mistake, I hope. But, after all, it's just as well things happened as they did, and I let her go. If it wasn't my pin, it would have been something else, maybe worse. The way she turned out proves that. I always had a kind of feeling that there was a bad streak in her, but I fought against it; I wanted to help her. When I heard about — about how she was — was behaving down there in Mexico, I was thankful I hadn't kept her in the house any longer.

I'm speaking pretty plain, I suppose, but I can't help it. You forced it on me."

Nathan did not answer. What should he have said? And in a moment a sudden slamming of the gate and rush of steps up the walk startled them all. Mrs. Ducey was still talking, Francie gazing at Burke with a frightened look on her pale, tear-stained face, the opal pin winking with its uncanny fires from its place under the direct lamplight, when William burst upon them, breathing hard, his waistcoat undone, the perspiration glistening on his pallid forehead.

"Anne! Good Heavens, where have you been? I've run all over town looking for you. I hadn't any idea you'd be at home, till somebody said they'd seen you starting for the house. You've got to come at once — I hope it's not too late already. The people sent up to tell us Uncle George is dying — he's had a stroke and he can't live. Vardaman's there, and he says the old man can't live. Come along!"

"Uncle George? He can't live?" echoed Mrs. Ducey, blankly. "Goodness!" She gathered up her shawl mechanically. "Do button your vest, William; it looks so horrid that way!"

CHAPTER XIX

In which Mr. Marsh's Will is Opened

When Jimmie Sharpless and I were in Mexico together, at Tampico and Puebla and whenever the army happened to encamp near a town of any size, we had a habit of visiting its cemeteries, not, it should be said, for the sake of the moral effect, or because our tastes were anywise morbid, but out of the same curiosity that led us to the market-houses and churches, and finding the graveyards twice as significant and interesting as either of these latter. They were all of one forbidding pattern, utilitarian, ungraced by sentiment. In the wide barrenness of that land one would have supposed that His acre might be spared to God without loss; yet I doubt if any Mexican place of burial was that spacious. Adobe walls ten feet high and on one side always six feet thick shut them in; not a flower bloomed there, not a blade of grass dressed the hard, dusty mounds. The population was so crowded in these grim democracies one soon ceased to be surprised that a number of the dead were deposited in cells constructed in that thick section of the wall I have spoken of; and the outer end of the hole being sealed up with a tablet recording the name and age of the deceased with (generally) a pious sentence commending his soul to Providence, you might behold them docketed and pigeon-holed, tier on tier, dreadfully resembling a post-office. "But I am afraid some of the mail will never reach its address!" Jim said sardonically, examining the inscriptions. We learned that the cells were rented or leased by the year, like any habitation of the living, the deceased leaving some provision for it in his testament, or laying the obligation on his heirs. Nothing ever changes in Mexico; the cemeteries must have been there in the selfsame spot for centuries; and, not knowing whether this queer custom was an inheritance from Spaniards or Aztecs or some older civilization still, Burke used to search the stone labels for their most ancient dates. He had a fancy to discover the oldest tenant, and a tablet of a

hundred or so years back would have moved him like the tombs in Westminster Abbey. Lo, seek as he would, there was not one antedating the last generation! Sharpless, however, upon this singularity being pointed out, was ready with an explanation. "I inquired," he said, "of a one-eyed gentleman who officiated as sexton at one of these places. It seems they turn 'em out if the rent isn't paid. They turn out Don Ramón de Silva's old rattletrap skeleton and his mouldering old coffin — he is several months in arrears — and make room for the late Don Manuel Carlos Derecho y Izquierda, just dead the other day of the small-pox — may he rest in peace! He will, as long as his son, young Don Manuel, doesn't forget the rent. But when Manuel's son Manuel comes along, what then? Shall a man be forever footing the bills of an old party who died before he was born? Grandfather Manuel's tastes were too expensive; he had no idea of what the cost of living would be in thirty or forty years, or he'd have thought twice about the cost of dying, by George! I fear old Don Manuel will be evicted in his turn. I asked my one-eyed friend what became of the defaulting tenants? 'Señor,' says he, 'they burn them. They burn them with kindlings, at night, so it shall offend nobody. But, Señor, nobody ever remembers about them, or comes to inquire.' We do these things better at home, Burke. We forget our parents decently, without any disagreeable publicity. And Pa doesn't saddle any such unwarrantable tax on us; he hasn't left us any more than we can scratch along comfortably on, as it is. We buy a lot in the cemetery — as handsome a lot as there is — and we look after it, sir; we have the grass cut every time there's a funeral in the family! Did any man ever know the way to his family lot? Fortunately there is always a plat in the cemetery office. We wouldn't think of turning out that skinflint Jones's grandfather and putting Cousin Joshua in his place; and it's pretty late in the day to burn Jones's grandfather — that operation must have begun long ago. Oh, unquestionably we do our duty, and we ought to be thankful that we are so much better than our neighbor Mexicans."

It once or twice occurred to Burke to wonder what would have happened if old George Marsh had been subject to the

Mexican forms; how long his memory would have endured, and who among the heirs would have provided for the poor old sinner's tenure of his narrow house for as much as ten years, or even five. Truth to tell, Nat could imagine it of none of them, though each had been indebted to the old man many times over during his life, and benefited considerably at his death; and though they were all just, upright, and kind-hearted men and women, no more inclined to greed or selfishness than — than any other set of heirs. It is a position which somehow seems to bring out all mankind's ugliest qualities; and as in Burke's occupation of the Law he was frequently concerned with the administration of estates, this melancholy fact was familiar to him long before the Marsh heirs gave an illustration of it.

None of them were present at the funeral, except the Ducey household; the others, dispersed as they were, many of them hundreds of miles away in Louisiana or Florida, could not have reached the city in time. In fact, there was a very scanty attendance of friends and acquaintances, making that depressing ceremony more depressing still. George Marsh had long outlived his old friendships and the capacity for making new ones. Mr. Ducey, scurrying about in search of suitable pall-bearers, — for William was a stickler for the proprieties, and shone greatly in the discharge of duties of this sort, where he always displayed admirable energy and good taste, — confided to Burke that it was almost impossible to find anybody who would do. People had ceased to know Mr. Marsh; they were all too young, too busy, too self-centred; and "Hello, has that old fellow gone at last?" expressed their utmost interest in him. Messrs. Burke and Lewis, in default of any one more appropriate, were finally invited to appear on that sombre staff. The office was closed, and all our young clerks attended in a body, instead of taking advantage of the holiday to go fishing, something which a good deal surprised us. They missed Mr. Marsh, the boys said. And, for quite a while afterwards, his old split-bottomed, hickory chair stood in its corner of our main room, disused, in a respected isolation. His landlady, with whom he had boarded for the last twenty years, turned out in full mourning, wept profusely and rather noisily amongst her black crape and bombazine, and would have joined the

family in their reservation, but for Mrs. Anne's sharp snubbing. The latter's indignation at this impertinence may be imagined. "The idea! Crying around as if she were one of us, and wanting to stick herself in with the family. I suppose she thinks just because Uncle George lived there so long, she can be familiar. I never knew her nor called on her in my life. She probably is certain he's left her something — I don't see why she should expect it. He had people of his own, and didn't need to leave anything to strangers. And the way she kept up that sniffling and crying was *too* absurd — just as if she were broken-hearted! I'm his niece, and though, of course, I feel badly about poor old Uncle George, I can't do much crying. It's perfectly impossible to *cry* for a person eighty-six years old!"

Dr. Vardaman and Miss Clara were there, of course; and Governor Gwynne came, looking much more feeble and broken than Mr. Marsh ever had, although he lacked at least ten years of the latter's age. But old George had hardly showed any signs of physical breakdown even during his last days. "He et just as hearty as ever," the landlady told Burke mournfully; "and never complained of a single pain. That last night I remember his saying when he got up from the table that he was going to get some papers out of his desk and take 'em down for you to look over the next morning, Mr. Burke. He was just as *spry*. The lamp was lit in his room, and he must have set down by the window to cool off for a little — it was awfully hot, you know. That's where we found him, setting by the window. We didn't any of us get to bed till right late 'count of the heat, and I kept noticing that the light was burning in his room still; I was kind of restless, and every time I woke up there was that light shining through the transom. Last I got kind of uneasy, and got up and knocked at Mr. Sievers's door and asked him if he wouldn't go up and see what was the matter with Mr. Marsh's light. Minute he went in the room and came back and says, 'Mrs. Woolley, will you please to come here a minute?' I just had a kind of *feeling*. I'm that way, I always *feel*. Mr. Marsh was setting there in his chair by the window, kind of sunk down in a heap, you know, and breathing hard that way they do. I don't think he'd opened his desk at all; he had the key in his hand, and a paper in the

other all clenched up — but 'twasn't any paper out of his desk, it was a letter that had come while he was out, and I'd sent Sairey up with it and laid it on his table. I guess he was reading it when the stroke took him. I knew what it was the minute I saw him. 'You run for the doctor as hard as you can pelt — run for Dr. Vardaman!' I says to Mr. Sievers. We got him in bed and got the brandy and hartshorn, but it wasn't any good. Only Mrs. Ducey needn't think that everything wasn't done for her uncle, Mr. Burke, because it *was*. Dr. Vardaman said we couldn't have done any more. He died at six o'clock that next morning. I took that key out of the poor old gentleman's hand and the letter and gave 'em both to Mr. Ducey, and gave him all the other keys, and there hasn't been a thing touched. Whatever the papers were in his desk they're all there safe and sound. . . ."

All this and a good deal more she imparted to Nat in a voluble undertone while the pall-bearers were waiting in the boarding-house back-parlor with the blinds lowered, and sandwiches, plum-cake, and whiskey-and-water set out for them on the table according to the custom of our day. The hearse stood outside; in a few moments we should start for the church. It was always a chatty half-hour with the pall-bearers. I don't now why Mrs. Woolley selected Burke for her confidences; but people so frequently did that nobody in the room saw anything out of the way in it; and she evidently felt the need of some sympathetic or, at least, receptive listener after her late rebuffs. We buried the old man in the lot in Greenwood which he himself had bought — at a bargain, more than likely — thirty-five years before, where you may see his headstone with "George Marsh. 1766–1851" on it; the lettering is a little indistinct now. "Uncle George always liked everything *plain* and *simple*, and we want to carry out his wishes," Mrs. Ducey said gravely; "besides any kind of monument would be very expensive, and none of us separately have the money to put one up. *I'd* be perfectly willing — although I wasn't left any more than any of the others — to give my share; but you can't persuade all of them to join in." Sentiments which reflected the highest credit on herself and, indeed, on the whole family; for every one of the heirs said exactly the same thing!

Mr. Marsh's will had been drawn by Governor Gwynne fifteen or twenty years before. On its being opened, he was found to have left all his property to be divided equally among his six or seven nieces and nephews, Walter Marsh's children; no mention was made of his English relatives; he must have outlived all of his immediate family on that side, and knew none of their descendants. A clause provided that "the sums which I have from time to time advanced to William Ducey, husband of the aforementioned Anne Marsh Ducey, for which I hold their joint notes, shall not be charged against the share of the said Anne in the division of my estate." There were no charitable bequests; old George's charity began — and ended — at home, and, considering the more or less needy circumstances of all the legatees, no one could criticise him. The fortune he had amassed by so many years of thrift and hard work came to about a hundred and eighty thousand dollars — a good round sum for those days, although not so much as he was reputed to have been worth. In the beginning he had named an old friend and contemporary, Mr. Jabez Starke as executor. He had the luck to survive this gentleman several years; and Gilbert Gwynne told me with laughter he remembered old George coming into their office shortly after Starke's death, and, after carefully inquiring whether an erasure would make any legal difficulty in his will, and explaining that he wanted to appoint somebody in the dead man's place — "he went to work on it with his old horn-handled penknife, Burke. He said he'd just leave the '*rke*' on the end of the surname as that would save scratching; but I'm afraid he had a pretty hard time hitching the rest of the new name on in front. You can scarcely read it." There could be no doubt of Mr. Marsh's intention, however, as, at some later date, he had added at the bottom of the page in a hand still firm and legible at fourscore: "I hereby appoint Nathan Burke, Esq., my executor; and I desire that no bond be required of him."

We cannot suppose this choice to have been the most agreeable in the world to Mrs. Anne Ducey. She had to submit to it; and allowed Burke to come to the house in the course of business, and went herself to the office to sign papers, on the principle that what can't be cured must be

endured. One of the first questions she asked, with a certain perceptible suspicion, was what that phrase "without bond" meant exactly. Burke explained.

"It's only an expression of confidence, Mrs. Ducey," he added, reddening a little, "as it happens an executor is obliged to give bond in this State. But Mr. Marsh didn't know that."

"H'm!" said Mrs. Anne, "then it doesn't amount to anything after all, one way or the other? I mean it don't make any difference to anybody?"

"To nobody but me," said Nat. And perhaps something in the young fellow's face struck Mrs. Ducey, for, after going out of the office and downstairs into the street, she suddenly and quickly came back again, her black mourning skirts flowing and rustling with that slight, dainty noisiness so characteristic of her. She went impulsively up to the desk.

"I — I'm afraid you'll think I *meant* something, Nath — Mr. Burke, by what I said just now. I was just thinking maybe it sounded to you as if I *meant* something. But I didn't, you know. I'm sure we're all satisfied with the way you're doing — everybody in the family is satisfied." She held out her hand to him, troubled, anxious, equally generous and tactless; they shook hands for the first time in five years.

If, however, the family were satisfied with Mr. Burke's administration, — and a number of them wrote to ask who "this man Burke" was, — they were not by any means so with the will itself, although you might have thought it, on the face of it, as fair and kindly meant an instrument of the sort as ever was invented. Almost any one of the Marsh heirs, I think, could have disposed of the property better. Before long letters began to crowd in, complaining, inquiring, expressing the most profound regret and astonishment that Uncle George had thought it necessary to say this, to do that, to leave written down the other. Nobody wanted to *make trouble*, for everybody *hoped* it would be understood that they were not in the least disappointed, for Heaven knew they had *never* expected a penny from Mr. Marsh, and the old gentleman had been most generous, but they would merely like to have it explained *why*, etc., etc.? It was a well-known fact — all the

family knew it — that Uncle George had taken advantage of his brother's widow, Grandma Marsh, when he wound up Grandpa's estate, so that, after living in the greatest luxury, she had been obliged to scrimp along in the smallest possible way for years. And they were glad to see that the old man had done the right thing at last, *as far as he knew how*, by leaving his property to be divided among her children; but how did it happen that, etc., etc.? Nat was amazed to find out to how many different people Mr. Marsh had been indebted for his rise in the world. So-and-So's husband had gone to the rescue, and practically saved George from ruin during the financial panic of 1820. Such-a-One's father had absolutely *made* Mr. Marsh by introducing him to the governor of Louisiana and other influential persons to whom he could lend money. Somebody else had pointed his attention to a vast cotton speculation on which he cleared *thousands*. Was there ever such a lucky man in his advisers and friends? And alas for these latter! They saved him, themselves they could not save; they all died leaving *their* families poor as church-mice!

Mrs. Ducey herself was very surprised and resentful upon hearing that her son, Uncle George's own namesake, had not been separately and handsomely remembered; not that she was *disappointed*, or expected anything more than she had a *right* to. Uncle George had always been very good to her; he simply wouldn't *let* her take care of him, although she would have loved to do it, and she knew it looked queer to people that she didn't. But he had never cared for Georgie, and had never done him justice. She knew Georgie hadn't always acted right, but he was too young yet to be judged, or found fault with, and, anyhow, he wasn't any worse than other young men — nor indeed half so bad — and she certainly thought Uncle George might have been more consistent and less prejudiced. As for that about those notes not having to be paid back, or charged, or whatever the term was, she thought it was perfectly horrid of him to have had that put in, when he knew it would be published when the will was probated, and might injure William in a business way very much. If he didn't want the money, why didn't he burn the notes up, and then there couldn't have been any talk about it? There was, however, less talk about it than

poor Anne supposed, for that William Ducey was in old man Marsh's debt hundreds and even thousands of dollars was no news to any one, and hardly aroused a single comment; and it is only fair to say that not one of the other heirs, with all their questions and objections, ever found fault with that provision of the will, or even remarked on it.

From all this it will be seen that every Marsh heir had a solid moral right to his share, so that there was really no occasion for them to express much gratitude towards the dead man, or to cherish his name, or do anything, in short, but forget him as quickly and conveniently as might be. After all, he had been a hard and unlovable man; it would not have been in nature for people to remember him long or kindly. Mr. Burke simplified the situation wonderfully by explaining to the more belligerent of his correspondents, who perhaps estimated their claims a little too high and threatened legal proceedings, that any attempt to break the will would, under our laws, involve a recognition of the English heirs, who might be legion and would have equal rights; and that, in his opinion, half a loaf was ever so much better than no bread — arguments of which everybody at once perceived the force!

He was surprised to find that Mr. Marsh's desk and papers, which Nat remembered as the only neat, tidy, and well-ordered thing about the old man, were in a good deal of confusion although nothing was missing, and much had been carefully treasured up which could not possibly be of any use to old George himself or any one else. Dozens of those greasy old pocket-books in which he was so fond of making calculations — stacks of the ancient ledgers and account-books of DUCEY & Co., wherein Burke recognized his own entries of almost fifteen years back — packs of ragged, yellowing letters half a century old — he went through them all, gaining, unconsciously perhaps, a more intimate knowledge still of George Marsh's life and character. Locked up in a separate tin box were a number of deeds, mortgages, abstracts of title which may have been those very "papers" the old man was forever planning to have him "look over." Nathan knew something about them already; they were all on record, and once upon a time he had been quite diligent to search the county books and find out all he could about

Nathan Granger and the lands in the Refugee Tract. Haven't we all had our dreams, eh? In youth, at any rate? There is something fine, even to the most practical and prosaic of us, in fancying one's self for a moment a disinherited hero, coming into his own again. I have seen the thing happen on the stage and in countless novels. The rightful heir brings out a "paper" that proves everything; all hostile claims are whiffed away like gossamer; the illegal possessors of the title and estates are turned out neck and heels — hurrah for Right, Justice, the Law! Burke had long since put all these gilded notions by; he read the deeds with a grave curiosity. And it was while he was thus occupied, sitting alone in the office one day, that he received a visit from, of all men in the world, 'Liph Williams, whom he had not seen for years.

'Liph was hale and hearty; and, in fact, he could not have been over fifty, but, like all his kind, he had begun life early and aged long before his proper time. He had grandchildren already, some of them grown up, and he talked like a Methuselah. Mrs. Williams was dead; and Mrs. Darce, too, at the age of pretty nigh a hundred, 'Liph reckoned; she had outlived her daughter a year or two. He himself had had a right smart spell uv fever, didn't know ezzactly what you'd call it, but when he got up, I swanny, he was plumb deef in both ears! Uv course, it wored off after erwhile, but he was a leetle deef still. Didn't know whether it was th' fever, er th' med'cine th' doctor give him. What? Ye gotter speak a leetle louder, Nat.

You had to roar, in truth; and the weather being warm and all the windows wide open, Nathan wondered with inward amusement how the passers-by would construe the racket. "I hope 'Liph hasn't any secrets to tell," he said to himself. The deefness had not wored off quite so much as 'Liph believed, and his own voice was loud, high-pitched, and monotonous, as those of deaf people commonly are.

"Yeh needn't ter shout at me," he explained a little testily, observing the effort Burke was making; "jest speak a *leetle* loud, y'know. Well, well, it's kinder good ter see ye, Nat; I ain't seen yeh sence yeh come home from th' war 'n' got th' sword give ye. I was thar, y'know, bellerin' fer 'Fightin' Burke' th' loudest one in th' crowd, I guess. When ye come

out at th' top of the State-House steps after they done it, y'know."

"I remember. You came around to see me afterwards," bawled Nathan.

"Uh-huh, that's so. We had a real nice time, talkin', didn't we, 'bout pore Nance Darnell, 'n' ol' Jake 'n' ol' times," said 'Liph, with unconscious irony. "Yes, we hed a good talk."

"You ought to come in town oftener, 'Liph."

"Well, there ain't anything fer me ter do here, an' nobody much to see," observed the other, tactfully; "there's ben a lot uv folks died here lately, Nat. I've allus noticed they go that way; kinder die off in droves, all of 'em that are 'bout of an age. Ol' man Marsh he held on longer 'n' most. Did he leave much, Nathan?"

"Yes, he left a good deal."

"They's a sight of relatives, I've heerd tell. I guess it won't amount to no great lot apiece, come to divide it 'round among 'em all, hey?"

"Oh, everybody will get something."

'Liph settled back in his chair, baffled. "Pretty dern pertickler, ain't ye?" he said sulkily; and then a new expression came into his face. He cleared his throat, and hitched closer to Burke's desk. "Nat," he said in what he meant for a confidential whisper — you could have heard it in the street! — "ain't you goin' ter do anything 'bout that? 'Bout them Refugee claims, yeh know?"

"Hey? What about them? Do what?" said Nathan, surprised and taken aback.

"Why, Lord love you, I know all 'bout 'em. 'Bout yer Grandpa Granger owning that there proputty in th' Refugee Track 'n' all — Slemm, he told me," 'Liph said with impatience; "yeh don't hev ter be so almighty close-mouthed. That proputty had orter be yourn, by rights, Nathan. Ain't you goin' ter put in no claim? Now would be a first-rate time, seems to me."

Burke considered the other a minute in a thoughtful silence. Then, "I'd like to know what Slemm told you, 'Liph," he said.

"Jest what I'm sayin' — jest what I'm tellin' ye," cried out Williams, eagerly; "I wouldn't make no mistake 'bout

a thing like that, would I? He said they was a lot uv land in th' Refugee Track that th' Gov'ment give yer gran'ther back in th' Revolution time, becuz he'd quit Canady where he was born 'n' lived till he was a man grown — becuz he'd quit there 'count uv bein' agin th' ol' country in th' fight. He said th' Gov'ment done th' same for a hull passel uv folks — Refugees, they called 'em. He said yer grandpaw settled in New York State first, 'n' then he moved to Pennsylvany, 'n' then I s'pose he thort he might 's well come 'n' hev a look at his land that th' Gov'ment give him. An' then Slemm said he up 'n' died 'fore he ever laid eyes on it — died uv th' cholery when they hed a kinder pest uv it over to Steubenville, er somewhere near there. Slemm he said th' childern was all minors at th' time, 'n' he guessed nobody knew much 'bout th' land, er they didn't know enough ter keep holt uv it, anyhow. He said he hedn't kep' track uv all uv 'em; he thort they mostly died er drifted off somewhere. But yer maw was one; he hed her all down, 'n' knew she was married ter John Burke, 'n' all there was ter know 'bout her. Why, I remember yer maw, Nathan, but we didn't know nothin' 'bout her people; she was a pore, sickly little thing — didn't live no time. Ol' Mam Darce she told Slemm a good deal, y'know. I ric'lect th' first time he come we suspicioned he didn't mean you no good, but when we got to knowin' him better we found out he was a real nice gentleman. He jest wanted ter see you righted, that's all."

"Very kind of Mr. Slemm, I'm sure," said Burke, dryly.

"Why, warn't it all *so*, Nat?"

"Oh, yes, it's true — or mostly true."

"Well, then, ain't you goin' to do *somethin'* 'bout it, Nathan? Slemm he was a lawyer — 'course I don't know how good a lawyer, but, anyway, he'd oughter know what he was talking 'bout — 'n' he said that every man Jack that ownded a title that went back to Granger could be lawed out uv th' proputty easy as easy! Becuz he said ol' man Granger never sold a foot uv it. It was just there, 'n' nobody payin' any 'tention to it, till some slick feller come along at th' time they was layin' th' city out, y'know, 'n' claimed ter be Granger's agent, 'n' sold th' hull track, 'n' pocketed th' money. Slemm said th' deeds that feller give — I've plumb fergot his name —"

"Name was Strawbridge — I have seen it on the records," Burke said.

"Yes, that was it, Strawbridge. Slemm said his deeds wasn't worth a damn; only as long as they wasn't any Grangers turning up ter make a fuss, folks jest moved in 'n' settled up all over, 'n' bought 'n' sold time 'n' time agin. He said you could sue 'em all, 'n' git it all back."

"And I suppose Mr. Slemm would be willing to conduct the case?"

"Well, yes," 'Liph admitted with a grin; "uv course he wanted to make somethin' out uv it. That's all right, ain't it, Nat? I don't see no harm in that. Man's got to live. But if ye don't like him, ye could do yer own lawin', an' 'twouldn't cost ye nothin'. Only Slemm he knew all 'bout who th' proputty owners was now, 'n' how they'd bought it, 'n' everything. Ol' man Marsh ownded more'n three-fift's uv it, he said. That's why seems to me 'twould be a pretty good time right now to begin perceedings, Nathan. Ye c'ld git at th' heirs so easy."

"I knew all about it long before I ever heard of Slemm. I found it out ten or twelve years ago when I was reading law in Governor Gwynne's office," said Nat; "and if I didn't bring action then, I'm hardly likely to now. It's not so easy as you think to make good a claim like that, 'Liph, after all these years."

"Well, but, my Lord, Nathan, why not? 'Tain't as if you was tryin' ter chisel 'em outer it; it's yourn, fair 'n' square. It 'ld be a pilin' lot uv money; it 'ld make a rich man of ye."

"I don't know that I want a piling lot of money and I'd much rather make a rich man of myself, without that kind of help," said Burke, part vexed, part amused. There could be no doubting the sincerity and single-heartedness of Williams's interest; he had been gradually growing more and more excited, raising his voice and thumping his hand down on the table to underscore his statements. It was nearing the hour of the afternoon when people would be coming in, and Burke, with one ear alert for the opening door in the outer office, found the conversation entirely too personal for publicity.

"You act plumb foolish," said the other, in a temper; "uv

course I know — er I kin guess — why you didn't come on ol' Marsh fer yer proputty. Yeh thort ye was beholding to him. Ye allus was a good sort of boy, Nat, 'n' ye allus let yourself be put upon. Ol' George didn't make no bad bargain when he took 'n' put you in his office, 'n' th' ol' skeezicks knew it. You've paid him out a dozen times; ye did two men's work 'n' got a boy's wages —"

"Bosh! You don't know anything about it, 'Liph," said Nat, good-humoredly; "wait a minute, will you? I think there's somebody outside." But 'Liph enjoyed the deaf man's advantage; he went on talking, and was talking still when Burke, finding the place empty after all, came back.

"— Ye ain't anyways beholding to the Duceys 'n' th' rest uv 'em that *I* kin see. Ye ain't got any call ter give up what's yourn to *them*, ner ter be so tender uv 'em — 'less'n you're goin' ter marry that little girl — that little Francie Blake, like somebody was tellin' me. Is that so, Nat?"

"That's nobody's business but mine," shouted out Mr. Burke, fiercely, finding himself all at once extremely warm about the ears — "and hers," he added hurriedly.

"Well, there! I didn't mean no harm askin'. It's jest what I heerd somebody say. Folks will talk, y' know. They talked like all-possessed 'bout you 'n' th' minister's girl. But 'bout yer proputty —"

"I'll tell you what, 'Liph, I'll wait anyhow till these Allen claims are settled, and see how *they* turn out. They're all located in the Refugee Tract, too, you know, and it's very much the same sort of case," said Burke, glad to return to the first subject; "and after that, if I feel encouraged —"

"Lordy, Nathan, they'll be pottering along with them Allen heirs from now till doomsday — they've ben at it two-three years already!" ejaculated 'Liph, in dismay.

"Well?" said the other, grinning; and Williams, seeing the joke, had to grin, too.

"'Twouldn't be that way with yourn, though," he said, taking his leave; "yourn's lots straighter claim 'n' what theirs sets up to be. I wisht you'd do it, Nat, I wisht you would."

CHAPTER XX

In which the Granger Claims are Settled

Mr. Burke turned again to his occupation of sorting out the Marsh papers after Williams's departure with a great appearance of zeal and business, so that Lewis, presently coming in from the Court-House, must have been profoundly impressed. But I believe that Nat had not changed documents for a half-hour, and the set phrases of the deed of sale which happened to be lying under his eyes all that time conveyed nothing whatever to his mind. He read and re-read mechanically that Hiram Small for, and in consideration of, the sum of eight hundred dollars ($800.00) paid to him by George Marsh, did hereby give, grant, sell, convey, and assign to the said George Marsh, his heirs and assigns forever, the property herein named and described, being Lot 15 on the plat of the southwest quarter of the northwest half . . . known as McBride's Half-Section (No. 26) . . . sixty-two and one-half feet fronting on High Street, and one hundred and eighty-seven feet fronting on South Street, measured in a line running due east from the junction of the above-named streets to Pickering's Alley, also sometimes called Luther's Alley. . . .

And how on earth (he thought) had that rumor about Francie and himself been started? It was absolutely without foundation — oh, absolutely! Ridiculous! Unkind! Neither one of them was thinking of such a thing — at least — It must be pretty widespread to have reached 'Liph Williams; but Burke & Lewis had an unusually extensive practice among the country people; and country people are active gossips. It would be very annoying to Francie if she should hear of it — somebody might be stupid or impertinent enough to blurt it out to her face in just this same way. But he would protect her from that in — er — in some way or other; he would see that she wasn't made uncomfortable. His going to the house so often nowadays doubtless gave

color to the report; but he merely went on business, and, good heavens, if people could only *see* her when she met him! How she treated him, how indifferent and cool and unembarrassed she was with him — if people could only see that, why — why, they'd soon *see!* She didn't care a pin about him, except for old times' sake — heigh-ho! Lewis called to him from the outer office, and he roused with a start and a guilty feeling, applying himself once more to the property herein named and described . . . and from thence due north on said Pickering's or Luther's Alley sixty-eight feet and five inches . . .

"Look here, this must be yours. Have you missed anything?" asked his partner; and he tendered Burke a crumpled-up envelope with one end torn off, addressed to George Marsh, Esq. "It was lying on the table, but the postman didn't bring it, for it's an old letter — one of the old man's, I suppose."

"I suppose so. There are dozens here, none of 'em of any importance. I'll have 'em seeded around all over the whole place, if I'm not more careful," said the other and looked at it carelessly. He was thinking of something which, upon the twentieth reading of Hiram Small's deed of sale, had finally forced itself on his attention. The lot on the corner of High and South was now owned and occupied by Mr. Michael Shea of the Golden Eagle Saloon and Billiard Parlors, with a very busy front entrance on High Street, and a no less busy rear door on the alley; it was considered one of the best (financially, so to speak) in town, and worth several times eight hundred, or eight thousand dollars, Mr. Marsh himself having sold it at an unheard-of profit ten or twelve years before. But now, as he read, a recollection of recent litigation connected with Shea and his Golden Eagle struggled to the surface of Burke's mind. Various patches of property across the way or in the immediate neighborhood figured, he remembered, in the often-recited claims of the Allen heirs; there were a dozen or more defendants — Governor Gwynne, who owned that piece next door with the shoe shop, was one, Joshua Barker, Dry-Goods & Notions, another — Nathan could not at the moment recall all the names, but felt certain that Shea was one. It was worthy of remark that the Allen heirs, under the judicious guidance of legal advisers such as

Messrs. Wylie & Slemm, without doubt, found fault only with titles to the most valuable and centrally located property in town, and brought suit by preference against men of wealth and note — or notoriety. "I should like to see Small's abstract — it must be here," Burke thought, searching amongst the long legal envelopes and bundles tied up with soiled ends of tape; "old George said he had kept clear of buying anything with a title from Allen — but he might have forgotten. The old fellow *did* forget towards the last of his life. These Allen heirs wouldn't be worrying around with Shea though, unless—" he paused. He had found, not the abstract, but another paper — a copy of a deed from George Marsh to Michael Shea warranting the title to "Lot 15 . . . sixty-two and one-half feet fronting on High Street . . ." and all the rest of it. "Goodness!" ejaculated Nat, mentally. He shoved the papers aside to make room, and doing so, came again upon the letter Lewis had handed him, lying there disregarded. He picked it up.

The jargon they talk nowadays of thought-transference, psychic influence, telepathy, and so on would have been unintelligible to us thirty-odd years ago; we were not dreaming of explaining the miracles of coincidence by any such elaborate method or in such magnificent terms; otherwise Mr. Burke, notwithstanding a somewhat sceptical turn, might have been converted to the occult creed then and there. He put to one side the warranty deed which, if a genuine copy of one actually existing, he knew to be in the circumstances a matter of some gravity; and he took up the letter which he believed to be of no importance. As it happened, in his position of Mr. Marsh's executor, he must have known all about both deed and letter within a very short time, even if he had never found or seen these. But that these acts of his should fall so pat together startled him then, and does a little now. As he drew the letter, which was torn in places, and much creased and rumpled, from the envelope, there fell out a bit of note-paper with a neat black edge of mourning and a line or two in Mrs. Ducey's fine Italian script: "This letter was in my uncle's hand when he was taken sick. It must have got separated from the others in the desk somehow. We have just found it. Please come up this evening and explain what it means. Anne M. Ducey."

Burke regarded it vaguely; it did not strike him until later that this note was, in its way, much more mysterious than anything that had yet happened. The letter was from Shea's attorney. Although they had straightened it out and smoothed it into some semblance of tidiness it still bore the marks of old Marsh's strong clutch. Death had surprised him in the most familiar act and posture of his life; his utter thought, the final effort of his will, must have been concerned with this alone. It was like a piece of drama, strangely significant and appropriate.

The young man — young man, indeed! Nat's head was fast turning gray, prematurely, to be sure, but still it was nearly gray, and he felt very old, sedate, and settled; I think it is time to stop putting that adjective to his name — Mr. Burke, I say, was so preoccupied with his recent discoveries, and the really curious accident of their following so close one on the heels of the other, that he finished his work and went to his rooms (where he lived now in some state and opulence) and ate his supper, and made an uncommonly neat toilette, and was on his way to the Duceys' with the letters in his pocket, all without its once having occurred to him that the lady's note was a sufficiently singular business in itself. As he walked up the path to the Ducey front door, it came into his head for the first time to wonder where that letter came from, and how long he had had it? It must have been with the other papers; in that case Mrs. Anne had written some days ago, for he had had them at the office almost a week. She would think he had shown an outrageous indifference and disrespect — *Whew!* That it had been mislaid and only found to-day wouldn't excuse him — *Whew!* She would be ready to petition the court to appoint another executor if he did not display more diligence and care, he thought with a laugh.

Although it was not more than three weeks since Mr. Marsh's death, Nat fancied the house and place had already taken on a look of prosperity and the indefinable reserve of a private residence; he understood the boarders had been, or were presently to be, dismissed. And only yesterday William appeared in a subdued splendor of rich new mourning, a black satin waistcoat, a new tall hat. Poor William! I believe a handsome allowance for

clothes and pocket-money was all he ever got — certainly it was all that was safe to let him have — out of the Marsh inheritance. He used to go about talking in those large phrases of which he was so fond about "our estate" and "our plans"; and was as ornamental, fluent, and useful at banquets and vestry-meetings as in the first days of his career; and Mrs. Ducey made him most happy and comfortable, I am sure. But the fact is, the honest gentleman had no longer any voice or authority in their affairs; he sat at the head of his table and carved the meat; and put a silver dollar in the collection-plate Sunday mornings; and listened gravely when business was discussed in the family circle, and signed his name where he was told; and was quite without cares and responsibilities. His wife, to the astonishment of Nat Burke — who managed her property for years — kept a pretty good grip on her gear. Some underlying vein of old Marsh's thrift and caution came to the surface in her; she was not shrewd — or not nearly so shrewd as she thought herself — but she was honest and domineering; and, except as regarded her son, uncompromisingly stingy as only a woman can be. Both William and Anne have been gone this long while now; and as for the property, who knows what has become of it? We heap up riches and cannot tell who shall gather them.

It was without any such gloomy reflections, however, that Burke went up the walk. He was picturing to himself with comic dismay Mrs. Ducey's face and manner upon seeing him; and was correspondingly surprised at being received with an appearance of anxiety and interest, but no resentment. Mr. Ducey was not in the parlor; he seldom came to these conferences. But Burke was acutely conscious of Francie sitting behind the lamp in shadow with her black skirts sweeping into the other shadows, her hands lying in her lap, and her averted cheek and the turn of her neck all a kind of soft, warm white; her deep brown hair packed and twined at the back of her head looked almost black; ladies wore a little white collar about the base of the throat clasped with some sort of brooch or pin in front, in those days, which showed off the set of the head and neck, and was a pretty fashion, I used to think. At least, it looked well on Francie. Nathan made his bow to her in a sudden distracting fluster of

thought; but if his manner betrayed confusion, it mercifully passed unnoticed, for Mrs. Ducey began to speak earnestly almost before the ordinary greetings were uttered.

"Well, Nathan, you've got that letter that Shea man, or whatever his name is, wrote to Uncle George? He wanted to go to law or make Uncle George pay him something — damages, or something, wasn't it? I couldn't make out what it was all about, of course, but I knew you ought to see it at once."

"I'm sorry I didn't come across it till to-day. I must have dropped or mislaid —" Burke was beginning apologetically when she interrupted him with a peremptory gesture.

"I know — it can't be helped, and I don't suppose it's a hanging matter, anyhow. Only, of course everything about Uncle George's business ought to be attended to promptly, I know. But the letter must have got mixed in with some of his other things — I don't believe that Woolley woman is much of a housekeeper, anyhow. Uncle George's room was in the *worst* disorder. Was the letter important? I mean, was it just Uncle George's private affair, or has it got something to do with *us?*"

Burke got it out and explained. "I don't know Shea's lawyer," he said, when he had made her understand as nearly as he could the nature of the Allen claims. "I mean to go around to-morrow and see him about this. Shea thinks he can come on your uncle — and, of course, on his estate — for whatever loss he has sustained through this Allen litigation, because of Mr. Marsh having warranted his title. Now —"

"Well, I *do* think of all things the law is the funniest!" ejaculated Mrs. Ducey. "First the Small man buys of the Allen man, and then Uncle George buys of the Small man, and then this nasty, saloon-keeping Shea buys of Uncle George — it's just like that Chinese ivory carving Jimmie Sharpless sent me, one ball inside another ball till you get down to a real little bit of a one inside them all. I don't know what Uncle George wanted to *sell* to a saloon-keeper for; he ought to have sold to some respectable person. And, anyway, the Small man is just as much to blame as anybody else; why don't they hunt *him* up and sue him? I can't imagine what Uncle George could have been thinking of —

he must have *known* giving any kind of warrants like that would make trouble. And here all these years we have been thinking he was such a fine business man!"

"He supposed the title was perfect at the time, Mrs. Ducey. Nobody had questioned it, and he must have held that property for years. And for that matter, from what I hear, I should be inclined to think that all these titles in dispute are good. But that's got nothing to do with Shea's complaint against your uncle, you know — for the time being, at any rate."

"Well, why didn't he begin long ago when the Allens first began *their* fussing?"

Nathan didn't know; he thought it likely Shea's lawyer advised against it. "He may have wanted Shea to wait until the Allen claims were farther along, before beginning another suit. I am sure your uncle had forgotten all about the warranty. This letter probably surprised him very much."

"Poor Uncle George!" said Francie, with a quick little sigh; "he was so alone." It was the first time she had spoken; and also she was the only one amongst his grateful heirs whom Burke ever heard express any feeling even remotely approaching regret in connection with old George Marsh. Mrs. Ducey looked up, suddenly horrified.

"Nathan, you don't think it could have given Uncle George such a shock he had that stroke, do you?"

"Oh, hardly that. Mr. Marsh was used to business dealings. Of course, we all know he had fallen off a good deal recently; he wasn't the man he had been. But even so —"

"Well, I wish it had all happened before he died, and then he could have attended to it himself, and we wouldn't have had all this worry," said Anne, nervously; "will it take a great deal of money to — to have the lawsuit? Or hadn't we better pay the man right off and be done with it? It won't take everything we've got, will it?" She looked around, pitiably worried. "I — I wish I hadn't told them all I wasn't going to take boarders any more. But they haven't all found another place yet —"

"Oh, don't worry, Mrs. Ducey," said Nathan; her distress and anxiety were such nobody could have had the heart to smile. "This is only an annoyance, and I think I can fix it up with Shea so that it won't be too costly —"

"I think it's too mean! Just when we thought we were going to be comfortable at last to have this turn up," Mrs. Ducey said, angry and aggrieved and helpless; "you talk about settling it up, but lawyers are so tricky you never know what's going to be the end of anything. They always get every cent of the money, no matter how the case turns out. Oh — I — I didn't mean you, Nathan, of course. I meant it's the rule with lawyers, everybody says."

"It doesn't make any difference to Nathan what you say. He knows everything we've got ought to be his, anyhow!" said Francie, in a sharp, clear, and resolute voice. She got up and came and stood between them, looking somehow taller and older in her black clothes and sudden assumption of authority. Her hands were clasped tight across her breast; the look she gave Burke held something almost vengeful in its pride of renunciation.

As for that gentleman, he sat dumb in a consternation and bewilderment as great as if she had exploded a bomb beneath their feet. He could not even think connectedly; and still in vacant surprise, he heard Mrs. Ducey exclaim: "*Francie!* What's that? Why, you've gone *crazy!*"

"It's true, I tell you! Everything Uncle George bought and owned around here belonged to Nathan's grandfather, and if he went to law about it, he could get it every bit back!" the girl proclaimed. "I heard him say so himself — or — or, at least, the other man said so, and you didn't say you couldn't, Nathan. You just let us have it because of Uncle George. If you think I'm crazy, Aunt Anne, ask him — ask Nathan!"

"*Francie!* You're *crazy!*" cried her aunt again; "what do you know about Nathan's grandfather?"

"Never mind! I know all about him. I heard him talking about it in his own office —"

"You heard who? You heard Nathan's grandfather talking!" said Mrs. Ducey, wholly at sea, and out of temper; "mercy, Francie, you dreamed it! You're talking perfectly wildly — it's not sense what you're saying!"

"*I say — I — heard — Nathan — talking — about — his — grandfather — this very afternoon to — another — man — and he —* the other man, I mean — *knew — all about it, too!*" said Francie, separating her words with a savage

distinctness; "it was in his *own* — *office* — *Nathan's* — *own office* —"

"*What!*" shouted out Mr. Burke, in his turn, galvanized into something like activity by this statement; "the office? *My* office? You haven't been *at* my office for days!"

"Yes, she has, yes, she has!" cried Mrs. Ducey, visibly perturbed; "she *was* there this afternoon. Didn't you see her? I sent her down with that letter, don't you remember? Why, how did you think the letter got there, Nathan?" And misconstruing the other's look, she added defensively; "There wasn't anybody else to send. I couldn't help it. I knew that letter was important, and Francie just *had* to take it down."

"*This* letter? Shea's letter?" babbled Nat, worse off in his confusion than before.

"Gracious, *yes! That* letter. What's the matter *now?* Francie said you were busy, and she left it for you."

"Well, I *did.* I left it on the table. And you *were* busy, Nathan, I heard you talking," said Francie, quite calm now.

"Well, but he says you weren't there; he couldn't have seen you — what is it all about, anyhow?" said Mrs. Ducey, in an exasperation; "I can't make head nor tail of what you're saying. And I'd like to know where you got all this nonsensical stuff about Nathan's grandfather. You never said a word to *me* about it before."

"Because I didn't know myself till to-day. And then I — I didn't know exactly what to do. I thought I'd wait till Nathan came, and — and — I thought I'd wait till Nathan *came,* you see. But it's all true, Aunt Anne. I heard every word they said. The other man wanted Nathan to get his property back — "

"Which other man? What other man? How did he happen to know so much? Oh, you can't have got it right, Francie."

"Ask Nathan, then! *Ask* him!" said the girl, forcibly, though she was trembling; "Nathan, you *know* it's so!"

Burke, who had been very injudiciously trying to force upon his muddled wits the double task of understanding the letter transaction, and remembering just what he and Williams had said in that ill-timed conversation, gave up both

efforts. "Do be sensible, both of you!" he remarked gallantly. "I — I mean, that is, let's try to get at what's happened. How did you happen to come to the office and go away without my seeing you, Francie? What did you do that for?"

"I don't care if I *did* listen. I don't care if it *was* wrong to listen. I'm glad I did. There!" she said vigorously. She seemed to think that this entirely irrelevant speech answered him. "But I just *couldn't* see you or talk to you right after hearing all that — I *couldn't*. I wanted to get away somewhere, and *think* first."

"For mercy's sake, *what* did the child hear?" said Anne, appealing to Burke in despair.

Francie began to explain, a little brokenly and incoherently: "Aunt Anne, when I got down there with the letter I knocked twice, and nobody came to the door, but I could hear them talking, so I knew there was somebody in. I — I knew Nathan's voice — only they were talking very loud — *awfully* loud — so then I went in. And there wasn't anybody in the front room, but you know those two partitions one on each side with 'Burke' on one and 'Lewis' on the other? The talking was all behind the 'Burke' door, and I was just going to knock when the other man — he's a deaf man, a farmer or something, at least he looks like one, and you called him 'Liph' — he began to ask questions about how much Uncle George had left, and then he got to talking about why didn't you get your property back that was in the old Refugee Tract — and I knew that was where ever so much of ours — Uncle George's, I mean — was, and — and I don't know why, I didn't knock. I listened. He was talking so loud, anybody could have heard outside in the street almost. You had to talk loud, too, to make him understand. I can remember every single thing you both said —" and, in fact, at this point, she repeated the whole of Williams's talk and Burke's, word for word, from first to last, with amazing accuracy. "And, of course, the longer I stood there listening, the worse it made it," she finished ingenuously; "I — I *had* to go away without your seeing me. And I wanted to *think*, anyhow. And you looked as if you might be angry if —"

"I looked as if — but how did you know how I looked?" interrupted Burke.

"I wanted to see, and there was a knot-hole in the partition, only it was too high up; I — I climbed on the table and looked through," said Francie, scarlet, but honest.

Mr. Burke, surveying her, exercised a self-control of which he is to this moment and instant proud; he knew if he laughed she would never forgive him. But Mrs. Ducey, who had sat silent through the recital, now spoke in a strained voice.

"Is all that true about your grandfather, Nathan? I don't know anything about the law; you know that. Please just tell me in a plain way if it is really all yours — everything that Uncle George bought in that tract, I mean. We don't want anything that doesn't rightfully belong to us. I mean by *right*, I don't mean by *law*. We'd rather you took whatever ought to be yours. *I* owe you still, anyhow, for what you did for my Georgie. I — I meant to pay you that as soon as we began to have a little more money — there were so many things to do at first, you know. But you may as well tell me right out — it's no kindness to try and make it easy for me. If all that land was your grandfather's and he never sold it, it ought to be yours."

Burke looked down at her, infinitely touched. I trust it will not be taken for a piece of idle fine talk when I say that if at any time in his career he could have had his inheritance for the lifting of a finger, he would not have taken it. But he could not tell Mrs. Ducey so; that would have been only to humiliate still further that brave, and proud, and upright spirit. There was something magnanimous in the way she trusted to his own magnanimity, relied on his truth and fairness.

"I'm sorry Francie heard all this talk, Mrs. Ducey," he said; "not that it was wrong for her to listen, or did any real harm, of course; we should probably have come to this sooner or later, anyhow. But it's a pity it happened this way. 'Liph Williams is my good friend, but he doesn't know a thing in the world about my 'rights,' as he calls them; he just wanted to hear himself talk. I have a claim in law on your uncle's estate; in right, I think I have none at all. If I had thought otherwise, I should have spoken about it long ago. I couldn't be satisfied any more than yourself to push a mere technical claim. That's not my idea of what

law is meant to do. You see, we think very much alike to that point — so much alike that it seems to me there's not much use our talking about it. We understand each other—"

Mrs. Ducey looked at him with a convulsed face; all at once she burst out in wild tears. "You're a good man — oh, you're a *good man*, Nathan Burke!" she sobbed hysterically. Francie ran to her, and put her arms around her with soothing words.

"She's all right — she'll be all right in a minute, Nathan," she said hurriedly. "I'll take her to her room. Come and lie down, Aunt Anne, do come; you're all worn out and nervous — it's my fault — I ought to have thought what I was doing. Never mind — you can talk the rest over another time — can't she, Nathan? No, no, don't go away now — wait till I come back — I'll be back in just a little. Please wait." She led her aunt away, leaving Burke alone in wonder and concern; he could hear her coaxing and supporting Mrs. Ducey up the stairs, and their footsteps overhead.

He stood waiting for a while uncertainly; then at last sat down again by the lamp. Francie might have some further tragic communication, he thought, almost with a smile — her manner had been very insistent. And, good Lord! — he said inwardly, with a gasp — suppose she had heard 'Liph's final remarks! But a moment's reflection convinced him that she must have clambered down from her perch, and gone scampering off by that time. He would never know, at any rate — impossible to mention it — that is — he felt himself redden at his own thought. He got up and went fidgetting about the room in a hardly controlled excitement, looking at the pictures on the wall, the gilt "Garland of Friendship" and other gift-books on the table, Francie's sewing-basket, and some kind of white embroidery-work on the chair where she had thrown it down. Just as he got to this point, she came back, walking into the room, and up to him with a strange little air of determination, at once defiant and accusing.

"Is Mrs. Ducey better? Would you like me to go for the doctor?" Burke asked anxiously.

"Aunt Anne's all right. I told you she would be all right — she doesn't need medicine. She's only nervous. I

suppose I ought to have told her about this differently — but it can't be helped now. She *had* to know; and *you* never would have told her. You know that!" said Francie, with severity.

"Well, I — I didn't see that there was any necessity —"

"Fiddle-de-dee!" said this remarkable young woman, very spiritedly; "you can't tell me any story like that, Nathan. You can't talk to me the way you do to Aunt Anne. You know very well that all that land was your own grandfather's, and ought to be yours this minute, and *would* be if you'd make the slightest effort to get it —"

"You're very much mistaken, Francie," interrupted Burke. "I don't know why you and your aunt both want to go jumping to conclusions like that. You seem to take what poor old Williams says for law and gospel. Setting aside any question of right or wrong, it would be a long, difficult, tedious matter for me to prove any claim at all. It would even be hard to furnish legal proof that Granger was my grandfather —"

"But you could, though. You know you could!"

"Well, and what if I could? I don't care to. I'm thirty-one years old; if I've got along without the Refugee Tract all this while, I guess I can finish out without it," said Nathan, not able to understand her insistence.

"That's just it — you weren't thirty-one when you first found it out. You could have had it any time these ten years, only you'd rather work and slave and pinch than go to law against Uncle George. You thought you were beholden to him, and that's the real reason you never claimed it, Nathan. It's just as that man said. You'd have tried to get it from anybody but Uncle George."

"And so I was beholden to him," cried out Nat; "and I think I should have been a poor sort of creature to have harried him with law-suits; there's no property on earth worth it. The old man that's gone was mighty good to me, Francie. You don't understand. Mr. Marsh was the first friend I ever had; he took me out of the stable; he *made* me; he —"

"You made yourself," said the girl; "anyhow, you don't owe anything to the rest of us. *We* never did anything for you. You could take it from us. You could take

my share of it, if you don't want to give Aunt Anne trouble — "

"Francie!"

She came nearer to him — came quite close, and put up her two hands against his coat unconsciously, in a gesture of entreaty. "Nathan, *please!* I — I feel as if — as if we *ought* to, you know — as if — "

"Francie!" said the young man again, huskily, and grasped her hands, as she made a motion to withdraw them with suddenly frightened eyes. He held them against his breast, looking into her face, trembling.

"Don't, Nathan, please, I — "

"Francie, I *have* to. I have to tell you. I love you." His heart raced; his throat drew together so that he could scarcely get out the words. He began again: "I love you. Sometimes I've thought you cared for me a little — not the way I care for you, of course, but just a little. There isn't anything about me to make a woman love me, I know that. But I ask you to marry me, even so; even if you only care a little. *Will* you, Francie?"

It came in a broken and unnatural voice; it was not at all what he had meant to say; neither were the time and place as he had planned them; for, I may as well confess it, poor Nat had rehearsed this event a score of times, since he first, with longing and uncertainty, began to wonder if it ever could be possible. He waited in a miserable suspense. She did not shrink from him now, nor try to take her hands away; she stood with her head drooped a little. Then she spoke at last, as brokenly as he — "Oh, Nathan, you *are* so — so — " and suddenly, neither of them knew how, she was in his arms with a kind of sob, and her face against his shoulder! Burke's arm tightened about her little, slim, soft, and yielding shape with an impulse that the next instant shamed him, yet it was out of his control; he put his lips against her pretty hair; he was afraid to kiss her, until she lifted her face.

After a while he said: "Do you know what you made me think of just now when you were insisting on my taking your share? You made me think of the very first time I ever saw you, and you wanted to give me your quarter-dollar — all the money you had. Do you remember?"

"Well, I had my way, too, didn't I?" said Francie, a tender mischief lighting her eyes; "I made you take it. Isn't this it on your watch-chain? I've always liked to think you had that, Nathan."

Burke was astonished. "I thought you'd forgotten all about it!" he said. "Once I said something to you about it, and you — you didn't seem to like my mentioning it. So I never did again."

"Nathan," said Francie, again; "you *are so — so* —!"

"Well, what is it that I am? You've said that before —"

"Why, it's just that you never seemed to *know*. You just wouldn't let yourself *see*, even when you — when you *wanted* to. It was — it was always you, Nathan. I — I never thought about anybody else. It was always you from the beginning, I think. Don't you remember how I cried that time when you went away to Uncle George at the store? I've wondered that you didn't understand."

"Why, you were only a little girl, then," said Nat, not quite able to believe this, in spite of her dear, earnest face. "How about all those little boys that used to come mooning around and load you up with pop-corn balls and molasses candy and stuff? I had to shoo 'em off the place. And when you grew up —"

"I sent them all off — I never cared for one of them," she interrupted, flushing brightly.

"I thought they weren't any of them good enough for you, Francie. Except Jim Sharpless —"

"Who told you that?" said the girl, quickly. "I never said a word to anybody about — about — I mean when men wanted me to marry them, Nathan. I never told. Girls do — some girls. But I wouldn't. How did you know?"

"He told me himself. Poor Jim!" said Burke. And they were both gravely silent a little. "He said he thought there was somebody else," said Burke, at last, with a faint sting of jealousy. "Was there?"

"It was you, Nathan. It was never anybody but you. When you went away to the war, I thought — I thought I'd never live through it. I used to look in the glass and wonder why my hair didn't turn gray. When I gave the flag to your company, you know — I don't know how I did it. I felt as if I were made of glass, and everybody could see right

through me, and knew what I was thinking and feeling when I stood up there on the porch and gave it to you. There was a man — never mind who — he was with you — that came and asked me to be engaged to him that morning. And it was the third time, and I was so weary and sad and — and bitter, I suppose — I was hateful to him. I told him I couldn't bear him, and please go away and leave me in peace. I never wanted to see him again. So he went away, hanging his head. He was killed afterwards in one of those skirmishes you had somewhere — and, oh, Nathan, that made me feel so — so — I might have been a little kinder to him. I *wish* I'd been a little kinder to him," said Francie, her eyes filling with remorseful tears; "but everything seemed to be going at cross-purposes, and nobody cared for the right person, somehow. When you marched, I ran away from them all at the house, and watched you go all by myself. You didn't see me. But the other man did — poor fellow! And then afterwards when the news came about the way you did at Monterey and Chapultepec and everywhere, I was so proud. I thought: 'Well, it don't hurt for me to be proud of him, anyhow. Nobody knows I am. It doesn't hurt, even if I haven't any business to be proud of him. I always *knew* that was the kind of man he was — '" She paused, a little out of breath with the hurry of this speech, looking at him both shyly and wistfully, the warm pink coming and going in her cheeks after that fashion Nat had always so loved to watch. But now his eyes fell before the clear truth and purity of hers.

"I — I wasn't worth all that, Francie," he said in honest humility; "I'm not worth it now. It isn't that I've ever done anything I'm ashamed of — but no man could be good enough for *that* — good enough for a woman like you to love, I think."

"Nathan," said Francie, in a queer voice somewhere between tears and laughter, "that's *just* like you — just exactly like you!"

CHAPTER XXI

Exeunt Omnes

This history is all but ended. For, as most such histories go, its hero having arrived at middle life, some success, a tolerable income, and a very great and undeserved happiness, there cannot be, in conscience, much more to say about him. You may, if you please, fancy Mr. Burke, on a certain fine morning in early spring, sitting down to his breakfast — of which he cannot eat one morsel — in a tremendous state of nervousness, with a new black superfine broadcloth suit about the cut of which he has some dark suspicions, and a new white waistcoat, and a pair of agonizing new boots, and a new plain gold ring in his pocket which he is in mortal terror of losing. It is his last breakfast at the boarding-house table; he spills the salt; he knocks over his coffee-cup; he grins feebly at his fellow-boarders' jokes. He jumps and turns pale when somebody rushes in to announce the arrival of Dr. Vardaman who, in his quality of best man, has called in a carriage for the groom. The unhappy-looking gentleman is not, in fact, about to wind up his interesting career under the guillotine; he is going to his own wedding in church before the whole of the town — is not his condition pitiable? You may read the next day in the papers: "Married — On Wednesday the 15th inst. at Trinity Church, by the Right Reverend Charles McIlvaine, D.D., Frances, only daughter of the late Francis and the late Cornelia (Marsh) Blake, to Nathan Burke, Esq., all parties of this city." And, strange to say, it has often seemed to Burke as if, instead of ending, his life-story only began in earnest upon that fortunate Wednesday the 15th inst.!

And so they were married and lived happily ever after! All Nat's dreams came true — or, at least, enough to satisfy any reasonable man. He had the little home he had longed for how many years; his old musket hung at last over his

own hearth, decorating the mantle in company with a pair of china figures simpering at each other in highly glazed pink-and-yellow garments — ornaments (begged from Mrs. Ducey) of which both Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Burke were, for some reason, very fond. And it was under the shadow of these china Lares that Nat and his wife sat down together to read a letter which came not long after the wedding, and, in part, certainly deserves quoting here. It was a far-travelled document, having been more than two months on its way; perhaps its author was not sorry in his heart of hearts to be out of sight and sound of Francie's wedding-bells, although he was generously glad to hear of his friend's happiness, and had already written them both most kind and hearty letters; and sent the bride a present of wonderful old Spanish laces fit for a countess, and a fan and a high, jewelled comb which she bestowed among her choicest treasures.

SACRAMENTO,
New Year's Day, 1852.

DEAR NAT (wrote Jim),

Since my last to you, I have gone, and come back from, a tour up Nevada County way, and along the diggings — or *washings* — of the South Yuba, and all its little tributary streams. They are all alive with gold-seekers — twice as many as when I was there about this same time last year, and five or six times as when I first came to the West. And notwithstanding that everybody has been prophesying ever since the excitement began that the gold would inevitably peter out in a few months or a year at farthest, they seem to be taking out as much as ever, with more continually in sight — enough for the whole United States, and the whole United States is coming here to get it! The feeling that it's too good to be true and can't possibly keep on this way, and that one must make hay while the sun shines is just as strong as ever, though; and every mother's son of them all digs, spends, works, plays with a frenzied energy. I don't believe anything like it was ever seen since the world began; certainly the old fellows who came pioneering out and settled up Ohio fifty years ago were no such exuberant lot; yet, barring the gold, the conditions of life must have been a good deal the same, and the character of the adventurers themselves not

very different. . . . One thing you may be sure of: not all the bonanza fortunes in California are dug out of the ground, or sluiced out of the rivers; you may leave all that manual labor and dirt and discomfort to others, and no matter how rich they strike it, your score may be even in the end. Run a saloon, run a day-and-night poker establishment, run a boarding-house at heaven-scaling prices, run a general store, and sell boots at sixteen dollars a pair, pork at a dollar a pound (mouldy; Lord knows what they'd ask if it were sweet!), and apples for seventy-five cents apiece — would anyone ask a gold-mine to pay better? I gave a dollar for a two-months-old copy of the *New York Herald*, which I got of my friend Mr. Hamlet Davis who keeps a store on Deer Creek (about fifteen miles south of the River), and also runs a kind of unofficial post-office, not having any legal appointment, and without pay. However, Hamlet will never go to the poor-house by reason of that piece of public spirit, as it brings all the miners between him and the Yuba to his store, and he does a rousing business in commodities at the scale of prices I have quoted. He coyly admitted to me that he was making more money than the average miner.

". . . They're hustling each other for elbow-room all the way up and down the Creek, and they all got to eat and drink, you know. Of course," he added philosophically; "the country will be cleaned out pretty soon at this rate, and the minute the miners go, I got to go too. There ain't anything *to* California but the gold; 'tain't any good for a farming country, and everybody can farm back in the States if they want to, anyhow, and live easier and cheaper. I calc'late to make my pile before she busts up teetotally."

This is the way they all talk. To hear them, one would think there never was a community so powerfully impressed with a sense of the ephemeral nature of earthly achievement. We are tolerably strong on morals anyhow in Nevada County, contrary to popular opinion back east, and the usual habit of newly-settled places. In the main we are more decent and law-abiding than some of the counties and cities at home in the old states that call us names. At any rate, this is what I have been warmly assured by Mr. Davis and others, and I never contradict — I don't want to make myself unpopular in this highly moral settlement. I already ran

some risk of it, not being a miner, or store-keeper, or express-rider, or gambler, or, in short, practicing any recognized or reputable calling; but I forestalled unkind criticism (at least, of the shot-gun variety) by explaining myself liberally to all inquirers, and showed Davis my last article on the inside sheet of the *Herald* to his great interest.

"Well, now, of course you wanted to see your name in print," he said, indulgently; "why, you didn't need to *buy* a copy just for that. I'd have let you have a peek. I guess I'll have to read that. Beats me how you can ever find anything to write about out here!"

I told him I should like to write about him if he didn't mind — at which he first looked suspicious, then grinned broadly. "You want to bear in mind the *Herald* comes to camp regular, young man," he remarked. And went on to say, more seriously, that if I undertook to describe any hold-ups, or shooting-scrapes, or claim-jumping outrages and so on, I ought to emphasize the fact that these wrongs were always righted as far as possible, and the offenders sought out and punished; and that their rough-and-ready justice was still justice quite as much in California as in Connecticut. "Once in a while the men get excited and act too quick," he said reasonably; "but they'll mostly listen to reason. I guess Nevada County ain't the only place on earth where guilty folks sometimes go free, and innocent ones get the punishment. You can't help feeling pretty strong against the half-breeds and Mexicans and Chinese. They ain't white, and that's all there is to it. You can't treat 'em like white men any more than you could a nigger. And Mormons; Mormons are bed-rock in my opinion. 'Tain't their fool religion, you know. It's them theirselves, and the way they live."

I said most people would be surprised that there wasn't more irregularity in living, all things considered. But I don't know of a place where a decent woman, or, in fact, almost any kind of woman could be more sure of respect and kind treatment. To which he replied rather ambiguously that there were mighty few women anyhow; three over at Selby flat (to at least two hundred men!), that little French widow that was dealing faro down at Centreville now, but she used to be in Nevada City; and all the rest were Mexican

or Indian. Here he had to break off to go and serve a young miner with powder and shot. It seemed to me they had quite a long dicker over it, talking in low voices; and when Mr. Davis came back he was absent and moody, and showed no disposition to take up the conversation where we had left off. Not until I was about to saddle up and leave did he return to his former geniality; and then he followed me to the door, and asked with a good deal of interest which way I was going. Upon being told that I expected to make camp on Rock Creek that evening, and keep on in a general north-east direction for the next two days, till I got to Kanaka — where there was a big stampede of miners lately, with rumors of fabulously rich deposits in the bed of the stream — he first looked, I thought, a little queer, hesitated, and then suggested Scott's ranch as a good place to stop, instead of camping out in the open on the creek. Why didn't I go on to Scott's ranch? It was only a few miles further, and old man Scott would be glad to see me. Old man Scott remembered me from last year — often talked about me. Why didn't I go on to Scott's? I said Scott's was too far, and that I would probably strike some miner on the creek, who would take me in; if not, the October nights were pleasant, and I didn't mind being outdoors. Well, he didn't know; it was mighty wild and lonesome up on Rock Creek. "Why," said I; "you just said they were hustling each other for elbow-room up there!"

He had no answer for that; and finally let me go with a sort of I-wash-my-hands-of-it air at once dubious and annoyed. So that, you see, Nat, I took the trail with a pleasant feeling of being in the wake of some kind of adventure; and so I was, though it had nothing to do with me personally. I suppose it was as much Davis' manner that put the idea into my head, as anything he said. This is a country where everybody most religiously minds his own business, and he had been so insistent against Rock Creek, when ordinarily he wouldn't have asked or cared anything about my plans, that anyone would have scented mystery.

Not far out of town I overtook the young miner who had been buying the powder and shot, journeying blithely along, as he openly told me on my dropping alongside, to his cabin on the creek. There was nothing mysterious about *him*,

at any rate; in the twelve or fifteen mile ride he told me all about himself. He and his pardner were washing with sluice-boxes, and what they call a "Long Tom"; been at it a year; last week they took out forty-one and three-quarter ounces — pretty fair, hey? It was ever so much better having a pardner; you didn't get so lonesome. When he first came out (from Rhode Island) he didn't have anyone to live with him, and though he made money right along, he pretty near died of homesickness. His name was Jackson, and his pardner's Anderson. Anderson was older than himself, a fine fellow, a splendid fellow, a man of education, you know, from Syracuse, New York. He liked to be with people of education, he could see I was, etc. He was very much interested to hear what my trade was, and vastly pleased with his own powers of perception. "I *knew* you were an educated man!" he said two or three times with pride; "are you going to write a book about California?"

I said: "I don't know enough to write a book yet, but some day I hope to. I was talking to Mr. Davis about that when you came in."

He gave me a thoughtful look. "Yes. That's what he said. He seemed to be kind of afraid of what you'd write to your paper about — about the way it is out here. But *I* don't see why it shouldn't all be put down, good, bad and indifferent. That's what I'd do, if I was writing. It *can't* be like it is back home; we've got different things to settle — things they haven't got at home —"

And I thought he was on the point of letting me into some interesting secret, when unluckily we hove in sight of his cabin, and the educated man from Syracuse came out to greet us.

Anderson was another good fellow, quite as pleasant and open in his talk as the younger man; and of course they asked me to stay the night, and set out the pot of cold beans, and made tea, and fried a bit of pork to sop our bread in, with the kindest and most unaffected hospitality in the world. "I make the bread," said Jackson, proudly; "the boys say I make the best bread of anybody on the Creek."

It was while we were sitting at supper, the twilight beginning to close in, and a star or two coming out prettily over the pine-tree tops, that all at once with a rub-dub of hoofs

on the trail, we heard several men ride up. The two partners simultaneously set down their tin mugs, and looked at each other and at me; outside the riders began to hail them.

"*He* don't know anything about it, of course," said Jackson to the other in an undertone; "I — I said I'd go, you know."

Anderson said he wasn't going anyhow — he didn't believe he wanted to. They were both plainly unsettled by my presence; at last Jackson went out to talk to the others, and I took the chance to say frankly to Anderson that whatever was happening, I saw I was in the way, but I would go on to Scott's ranch where I was known, and be just as much obliged as if I had stayed with them. He demurred hastily.

"Oh, you needn't to do that," he said, in concern; "we wouldn't have you do that. And besides — Scott's ranch! Lord love you, the whole of Scott's ranch'll likely be going along themselves! No reason why you shouldn't come too, stranger, if you feel like it. It's been kept pretty dark, but as long as you know this much, you might as well see the rest, seems to me. Don't want you to think we're ashamed of what we're doing, anyway. It's all square." With this invitation, after a little more talk, we went outside, and saddled up again, and joined the party; there were six or eight of them. It was so dark we could hardly see one another's faces, but nobody had on a mask or any kind of disguise. I suppose Jackson had accounted for me, for no one questioned my being with them. In fact, as we rode along, we received so many additions from cabins here and there that I should think there must have been between twenty-five and thirty all told. We struck right across in the direction of Round Mountain. There wasn't much talking; nevertheless we went along without any effort at secrecy. I kept near to Anderson, and after a while, when we were a little separated from the rest picking our way up the hill-side, he told me in a low voice what it was all about — gave me an outline, that is.

"Things have got to be pretty bad, before we can afford to take any notice of 'em," he said; "live and let live is our motto, generally speaking. But we've got to draw the line somewhere. I don't know that you've been here long enough to hear about Holiness Farm — it's only been going this last

year. Man came and located on Round Mountain ten or twelve months ago; he didn't appear to do any mining; just settled down there. It got around first he was a hermit; then some said he was some kind of missionary; then there was a report that he was spreading a new sort of religion among the Mexicans and Indians and Chinese and heathen generally. Nobody paid much attention to it; we're all busy, and a religion more or less don't make much difference here. I suppose there're forty in camp — but mostly no religion at all. Presently, however, it leaked out that it was only the women his reverence was converting. That don't ever look very well. They went up there in droves — so they say, I don't know anything of my own self — and the place being lonely and off to itself, nobody knew what they did exactly. Nobody paid much attention to *that* either; if Mr. Missionary's tastes ran to half-breed and Digger women, why, it was low-down, of course, but none of *our* funeral, you understand. It seems, though, they had some kind of shindy — *rites*, you know; and all the sisters had to bring tithes, or tribute; that's what gave Holiness Farm a black eye, as you might say. Because these Indian women and the rest would loaf around the camps awhile, then bye and bye they'd pike off to Round Mountain with a little jag of dust, or a good steel tool, or some fellow's clean shirt, or whatever else they could get their hands on. They're pretty slick thieves. We've missed things ourselves. Some of 'em live up there and do the work, cook and wash, and rock a little for gold off and on in the creek, while his holiness sets there and gets fat. Made the boys kind of sore. 'Tain't decent anyhow. So they've about made up their minds to invite him to leave — him and the squaws. Time the place was cleaned out."

All this information he delivered in that manner of ironic humor with which they seem to meet every situation, no matter how grave. I am more or less of a greenhorn still, and I swear I don't know half the time whether they are in earnest, or only having a little fun at my expense; and then again I am sometimes tempted to set down for our strongest national characteristic, the disposition to levity about serious things, and to a perfectly abysmal seriousness about trivialities! "Inviting him to leave" might mean anything

from a piece of horseplay to lynching; but in either case, I couldn't do much but look on, and keep my mouth shut. I asked Anderson what he thought the missionary could possibly do with his disciples' "tithes"? He answered succinctly that he "snaked" the dust and the eatables for his own use; and had been known to dispose of the tools and clothing in distant camps or to chance wayfarers — "You can get a whaling price for things like that, if you know how," he explained. "At least, that's what we suppose he does. Nobody's ever been inside his cabin. The boys gave it that name — Holiness Farm; seemed kind of appropriate, hey?"

We arrived there in about an hour, the last part pretty stiff climbing, so that we had to dismount and tie the horses, and make our way through the brush perhaps three hundred yards on foot, spreading out to surround the place. They all had guns or revolvers; I had left mine in my belt, and forgot it when we started. Jackson and I, and another man whom they called " 'Squire" — I didn't hear his last name — kept together. The place was very quiet and dark and peaceful, no dogs around to give warning, just an ordinary cabin in a clearing. There were some chicken-coops, and a lot of washing hanging out on a line. This all had so pastoral and harmless a look, I confess to some misgivings about Nevada County justice. If the Holiness-Farm-ers had been having some kind of orgy, chanting incantations over a pile of skulls, or dancing around a cauldron of witches' broth, it would have been at once more picturesque and more convincing. However, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (to borrow and debase a phrase) the scene changed; our advance had not been at all covert or stealthy, and as we stepped out from all sides into the open, moonlit space, on a sudden, appalling noise crashed forth point-blank in our faces; jets of fire sprayed from the cabin; invisible bee-like missiles zipped and pinged around; the mountains shouted back Homeric echoes; and I think every individual "squaw" within the walls must have let off a screech at the same time she pulled the trigger. Holiness Farm was "on"! They expected us, and in times of peace had prepared for war!

In the following infinitesimally brief pause, there went charging through my head Colonel Harney's order before

the batteries at the Niño Perdido, to "rush 'em, boys, before they have time to load again!" But no such haste was necessary; I was the sole creature, apparently, to take our welcome seriously; the whole thing was as inconsequent as a dream. A dying turkey — the only person injured in this struggle, as it presently developed — began a terific quawking and flopping, and all the poultry at once chorussed stentorian surprise and fright. On the instant the pines and mountain-sides reverberated laughter, gay profanity, goblin whoops and jibes. Invitations to try, try again, Brigham! advice on the proper training of a harem, lively unprintable suggestions, mock reproaches, hailed around. A torch sprang up; in a second, somehow or other, everybody had a torch; and men swarmed over the cabin, burst it in, swept it out, pots, pans, benches, flour-barrels, sides of bacon, shovels, blankets — and women!

There were only three of them after all, a Mexican screaming and praying, and two Indian women terribly frightened, but silent, poor creatures, after their kind. They looked like all the rest, dirty and barefoot with their long black hair streaming down — homely as sin! Apart from a little hustling, nobody offered to molest them; and, being released, the two Indians fled into the brush and were no more seen. The Mexican (who appeared to be a well-known character in the camps, and was pleasantly hailed by name, Pepita) crouched on the ground whimpering, among the chickens. In the meanwhile the hunt went merrily forward. I took no part; it wasn't expected of me, and I didn't want to bungle the business by interfering. After some uproarious rummaging, half a dozen of them dragged him out triumphantly. They had set fire to the cabin, whether by accident or not I don't know; nobody cared anyhow. The flames went soaring overhead; there stood the proprietor of Holiness Farm, with a blanket wrapped around him, and a beard like a prophet. I believe he had been found under a bunk or in some equally ignoble posture; and his first words in a shrill, trembling voice were: "What is the meaning of this outrage?"

One or two of the men collapsed on the ground and lay and rolled over, laughing; they all crowded near swearing and chuckling to get a look at him; it seems he rarely let himself be seen and his features were not familiar to the

settlement. I took a look, too, but merely to reassure myself, for, Nathan, I knew the voice or the manner or both the minute he spoke. It was George Ducey.

I cannot tell why I was not more surprised; perhaps I had already reached the limit of excitement. The surprise came later, when I sat down to think it over coolly. At the time, there was something weirdly natural about it; anything — all kinds of things — happen in California. You get used to it. The last time I saw George was on the wharf at Saint Louis in the nipping dawn, scuttling off with his two bunkoing acquaintances. The underworld had received him — why shouldn't he be here? Except for the beard, he was not much changed; and was as scared and sneaking and pompous and silly all at once as you would expect George to be. I have thought since that he has advanced considerably in the school of scoundrelism since the old days of his first essays; to camp in the Sierras, and get a lot of women to take care of him, and support him and steal for him — the exploit shows force and originality. George was always something of a lady-killer, you remember.

Somebody sang out to cut down the clothes-line, and for one horrible instant, I thought they were going to hang him; in fact, I believe some minds did glance that way. But, "Born to be drowned, you'll never be hanged" — and I think George had better look out every time he crosses water. They only tied him up, and put him aside while they gathered up the household goods, and completed the destruction of the cabin. Afterwards there was a court held, with a regular jury drawn by lot, and the "'Squire" presiding; it was brutally funny. The court, if you please, appointed Anderson to defend him; and he got up and made a sort of jocosely moderate speech, pointing out that no one had actually caught the prisoner stealing anything with his own hands, or disposing of anything that could positively be identified as somebody else's property; and that the women were notoriously given to thieving anyhow. "That was about all you could say for him, you know," Anderson remarked to me afterwards. "Anyway you can put it in your book that we did it all regular and according to form, can't you?"

There was a strong feeling in favor of giving him twenty-five lashes on the bare back, and turning him out of camp

on pain of hanging if he should ever come back ; some petty thieves over at Rose's Bar, they tell me, have been thus served. And as I saw them coming by degrees to that decision, I — well, I concluded to get out! I knew I wouldn't be missed. If ever there was a man who richly deserved twenty-five lashes on his bare back, it was George Ducey. But I couldn't stay to see it. If the whipping could have done him any moral good — But he would be the same after twenty whippings. And no matter how much he suffered physically, the real suffering and shame and distress would be for the decent, humane people that had to look on. By heavens, Nathan, since I've been thinking about it, it's given me a new and painful illumination on the whole subject of punishment for criminals. Something's dreadfully wrong somewhere.

I say I got up and left the circle just about as the jury were retiring behind the ruins of the cabin which was still burning slowly. It had set fire to the underbrush on one side, and some of us had been kept busy beating and tramping it out, for a fire in these mountain-forests during the dry weather spreads forever, and is a very serious matter. I went down to where the horses were tethered, and while I was bothering about in the darkness, trying to find my own, there was another great outburst of yelling, and one or two guns going off up at the late Holiness Farm. "They're beginning!" I thought — and it was a pretty nauseating thought, Nat, that whip coming down and curling and writhing all along George's bare back with a sting like a snake. Gr-r-rr! But the racket kept up; everybody seemed to be scattering and screeching. "What on earth —?" I wondered. Then one man after another came threshing through the thickets, swearing and fuming, to his horse. I inquired. George had got away!

It must have been done while they were at council. I think nobody was paying much attention to the prisoner whom they all knew to be securely tied; and the danger from the fire had further helped to distract us. They thought Pepita must have crept around to him with a knife and released him. She was gone, too. . . .

Anderson and I rode back to his cabin together. We left a posse beating the woods, but Anderson said he thought

they hadn't much chance of catching his holiness; the Mexican woman was cunning as a fox, he said, and probably knew every tree and bush on the mountains like a brother, and could walk the trails blindfold; they must have had ten minutes start or more. "He's good and scared anyhow. I guess that's the end of *him* in Nevada County," he added philosophically; "he knows the boys would string him up next time, sure as death and taxes."

I daresay Anderson was right. Lord deliver us, Nathan, what a life! What a life the creature leads! Slinking from one evil to the next, sliding a little lower and a little lower, missing punishment by a hair's breadth, yet, in one sense, getting punished all the time! How does he sleep o' nights? What does he look like to himself? What does he think about honest men? It's beyond me to guess. I hope I'll never see him again. But of course he'll turn up — they always do, to the discomfiture of their respectable families, who are eternally bolstering them up, and paying for them, and shielding them. The more vigorous rascals are soon and sometimes bloodily disposed of. But Tragedy is too great for George; she cannot stoop to him. . . .

I am writing you this letter at the opening of the New Year; and it comes into my head that it will probably reach you near the time of your wedding — a new and beautiful year for you. You will have many such, I am sure. Think of me sometimes, Nat. . . .

"We can't tell George's mother," Burke said, as Francie and he finished reading the letter, seated comfortably side by side on the sofa; "she doesn't know where he is, and it's just as well."

"George will come home if ever he hears anything about poor Uncle George's money," said Francie, wisely; "only I suppose that's not very likely, way off there in California."

"He'll hear," Burke said and laughed; "the world's a small place after all. And it's just as Jim says: there'll always be George." So, indeed, it has proved. But we did not give much thought to him then.

Francie curled up against her husband's shoulder. "Poor Aunt Anne!" she sighed pityingly, yet with a certain content; "poor Aunt Anne!"

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